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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 378. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 28TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

No. 378.] For the Week ending March 28th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

No. 311.

MY father was a Russian merchant of some standing in the City, and from early youth had been connected with the business, thus collecting a comfortable fortune. He gave me the full benefit of this by sending me to the university, and promising me a sight of the world before settling down to commerce.

A connection of the firm in Russia sent his son to England with a letter asking us to show him something of the country. I was at college at the time, so my father passed young Kepstinch on to me, with a request that I would give him an insight to "'Varsity" manners and customs.

I liked the fellow the first moment I saw him. He was delighted with everything, being much impressed by the freedom of English—and especially university—life. We had a splendid time, and became fast friends. Before going, he gave me a pressing invitation to Russia, which I readily accepted.

"I shall be leaving the 'Varsity' shortly," I told him as we parted, "and intend making a tour of the world. Russia shall be my first destination."

"That is a promise!" retorted Kepstinch, wringing my hand heartily.

"Rather!"

A few months after my friend left, with the rest of the world I fell a victim to the fascinations of an iron steed.

No sooner had the craze seized me than a brilliant idea entered my head.

"Why not bicycle to Moscow?" Elated at the thought, I wrote at once to Kepstinch, and unfolded my plan.

He replied that there were difficulties enough for a foreigner to get about Russia in the most approved style, and strongly advised me to stick to the railway.

I persisted, however, and Kepstinch, finding I was not to be persuaded out of it, arranged to procure me an exceptionally strong official pass, which would probably see me through any difficulties I might meet with.

I, like many of my fellow-countrymen, became far more enamoured of the idea when Kepstinch threw over it a slight halo of danger. He sent me a map of the roads, pointing out different places I could stop at, some of which were necessarily rather a long day's journey apart.

"Send me," he wrote, "the best photograph you have of yourself. I inclose a letter from an official which you must present at the frontier, where you will find yourself a person of some importance. They will have you examined by some magnificent myrmidons of the law, and identify you by the photograph, which will then be returned with several hieroglyphics on the back. Preserve this as your life, for wherever you go, you will find it a

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ready passport. It will come from a friend of mine who is head of the Secret Police."

I smiled as I read this epistle, glad at having determined to go by train to the Russian frontier, the quicker to enter upon the exciting part of my journey.

"No fun," I said, "cutting through Belgium and Germany; might as well be touring round Hyde Park for a month!"

So I went off with a light heart, having no fear for anything but the possible puncturing of my bicycle tyres.

At the Russian frontier I became veritably a notable person.

On producing my letter I was selected from the crowd of ordinary travellers, and marched off with a good deal of ceremony into a private room of the police.

Here they treated me with the greatest courtesy, and my identity being established, I was handed my own photograph, with sundry devices on the back.

The Chief of the Police, who spoke French, gave me every information and much advice.

I listened politely while he told me where to apply in case of trouble. I anticipated no evils beyond having to sleep under a hedge should my machine break down on one of the long stages.

He cautioned me to prepare for this contingency as well as my limited capacity would allow, and especially to take a good big flask of brandy.

After a night's rest, and having seen my luggage off to Moscow, I started on my way.

The country folk amused me; I was a source of great excitement to them. Some showed immense astonishment at my wheel, while others greeted me with what I instinctively felt to be ribald jests, and unmistakable hilarity.

My nights lodging was sometimes comfortable, more often not, but always interesting.

My tyres behaved bravely, so that the only anxiety gradually calmed and vanished, since the roads were even and the stones round.

On the fifth day I had to face a journey of eighty miles with apparently no inhabitants.

I supplied myself with as much food and drink as my machine would carry, taking the drink neat, and trusting for water to dilute it. So I rode off gaily, whistling one of the old college songs, and enjoying the wild, bleak scenery around.

The roads were fairly good, save for some white spa scattered about with dangerously sharp edges. They were, however, easily seen and avoided, until a spin down a delicious incline brought my stalwart tyre in direct contact with a sharp pointed edge of an embedded rock. Then, alas, were my worst fears realised. The tyre was not only punctured, but literally cut in half, beyond all amateur repairing.

I have been told I am level tempered, so I felt glad there was only the rock and the torn tyre to hear the hasty language that escaped my lips.

Having told these silent objects exactly what I thought of them, with my hands thrust in my pockets, and my forehead wrinkled into frowns, it struck me to look at my register. A groan greeted the intelligence: "Forty miles traversed. Forty more not only to walk, but to walk and push."

However, there was no help for it, and being about midday there was the chance I might get to a bed by midnight. I refreshed the inner man, lit a pipe, and started on my trudge.

Oh, how long the road seemed! What endless hours! What monotony and fatigue!

Ten o'clock found me enveloped in darkness, and according to my distance register, still eight miles from my destination.

A heavy sensation of intense weariness crept over me, taking the form of almost insupportable sleepiness.

I paused, my lamp burning brightly gave me a good view of my road for a few yards ahead.

If only I could find some sheltered spot in which to lie down and rest, but all was bare and bleak. I pulled myself together, and leaning heavily on my machine, dragged my aching feet along. A turning from the road caught my eye. Would that lead to some refuge? I peered through the gloom hopefully, and discovered by the aid of my lamp an uninhabited and dilapidated building. It might once have been a chapel, I could not tell, and cared less, the sight of any port in a storm is welcome. I tried the door, it opened on its rusty hinges. Nothing but bare walls greeted me, and empty window frames.

I crossed the floor to a doorway leading to a small inner room.

"This will do," I said, wheeling my wounded cycle through the doorless portal, round the corner of which I found myself slightly protected from draughts.

Congratulating myself on the discovery of even this lodging, I undid my light luggage, arranged a pillow, took a pull at my flask, extinguished the lamp, and threw myself down in a state of utter exhaustion.

In a few moments my troubles fled, and I sank into a deep dreamless sleep.

It seemed as if I had hardly closed my eyes, though it was probably many hours, when a dazzling light shone in my face, and I awoke with a start to find myself surrounded by about dozen men.

I sprang to my feet, but was instantly seized on either side. I stared at them bewildered, then pointed to my wrecked bicycle, hoping that would explain my peaceable presence there.

My gestures however had not the desired effect, and finding myself still in the grip of these burly strangers, I was marched into the next room.

The utmost excitement appeared to prevail, which I was utterly at a loss to comprehend. Two or three men quickly left the building with an evident purpose, while the others whispered among themselves, watching me as they did so with sharp glittering eyes. One of the band, a tall, handsome fellow, with thick eyebrows and broad forehead addressed me in an unknown tongue.

I shook my head vacantly, and replied: "I don't understand!"

"English," he said turning to his companions.

A look of satisfaction and relief passed round.

"*Vous parlez Français!*" suggested my spokesman.

I replied in the same tongue that I did.

"Why are you here?"

The question was asked in a solemn, sepulchral voice that re-echoed through the gloomy building.

I looked at the great strong fellow and thought what a warrior he would make.

My explanation was easily made. I detailed my adventure word for word, and apologised for sheltering in what was evidently their domain.

"You have heard what passed at our meeting?"

Their meeting! A vague suspicion crept into my heart. The mystery was clearing.

"Not one syllable," I replied quickly in my most convincing tones, and looking the spokesman straight in the eyes.

"How can we be sure of this," he said, half speaking to himself.

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I glanced towards the door, as the other men returned. They had evidently been outside to see if I had any accomplices, and appeared to give satisfactory assurances.

The tall man continued in his low, bass voice.

"Had you been of any other nationality," he said, "we should have been obliged to pass sentence of instant death upon you, fearing you might have heard what took place at our meeting here to-night. As it is, our society incurs great risk in letting you go free. We feel, however, that no one of your countrymen would debase himself by spying into matters which are purely Russian. Show us your papers to prove what you say, and we will leave you after receiving your oath that you heard nothing."

I brightened at the thought of the talisman which I held safely in my pocket, and blessed Kepstinch for his forethought. I raised my hand to draw it forth, but was again seized, while they politely but firmly insisted upon emptying my pockets themselves.

"They are afraid I may be carrying a revolver," I thought, confidently awaiting their production of the magic photograph, which would make them receive me as a brother, with open arms.

My counterfeit presentment was taken out and compared with the original. The likeness was unmistakable, and nothing of an incriminating character was found.

"But where is your passport?" asked the spokesman.

Before I could reply a cry came from a burly, long-haired man who was examining my photograph. The loosened grasps on my arms tightened, excited faces crowded round my picture, contorted with sudden hatred, while groans of disapproval broke from their lips. Something evidently was very wrong.

The speaker approached, his mighty form drawn up to its full height, his breast swelling, and his voice quivering with rage.

Three words came in the sudden hush, and re-echoed round the bare walls with hideous meaning and intensity:

"Prepare for death!"

I started back, chilled to the bone, amazed, incredulous.

For the moment surprise overcame my fear, and I burst out with: "What the dickens is the matter?" in pure Saxon.

One of the number stepped forward, and in poor, but intelligible English informed me that the signs on the back of my photograph showed me to be an emissary of the most secret and dreaded police, whose rule their society was formed to crush.

In fact, to my horror and consternation, I found myself stamped in an incontrovertible manner as in close alliance with the deadly enemies of these men. If I had been awake, as they half imagined, I should be possessed of some vital secrets of the most advanced Nihilist society.

In our darkest hours vivid and peculiar thoughts burn themselves on the brain. My home with its peaceful and well loved circle flashed quickly across my memory, I felt my mother's farewell kiss linger tenderly upon my lips, while I grasped again my father's hand. They were like visions from another world, immeasurable distance stretched between us, the barking of the old dog as he fawned about my knee grew fainter and fainter, there was the scream of an engine, the rush of a train. One desire came upon me with intense longing. "Oh! that I were at Charing Cross station on my way home."

Then the sensation of powerful pulsating life in my veins, compared in that dread moment with the dust of death, the horror of annihilation!

A fight for freedom was out of the question, though I pulled myself together for one great effort when the time came.

At all events I determined to die resisting.

The men were talking eagerly among themselves, and I was quick to notice that the one who spoke some English seemed the most irate against me.

He was evidently taking the lead in the matter of my execution, for which palpable preparation was being made.

A numb, paralysing cold seemed clutching at my heart with iron fingers, followed by deadly sickness, as I watched him produce a gleaming dagger, vieing with his *confrères* for the honour of using it murderously.

He approached me with queer dilating eyes, informing me I should have ten minutes to make my peace with God.

I returned his look with loathing, regarding in horror and disgust the miserable wretch who had so evidently demanded and secured the office of my butcher. I shuddered at the bloodthirsty tendency of this foul fiend!

What was then my amazement on hearing him half whisper in English by my ear:

"Escape is impossible except through me. Do exactly what I tell you without fear. Trust in my wits; it is your only chance!"

With these words he passed into the room adjoining, while hope sprang swiftly to my breast. I asked myself a series of bewildering questions, but answered none.

Could this man indeed have good intentions, and if so—how was it possible for him to carry them out? Perhaps he was only making it easier for me to die, knowing that an Englishman would have a struggle for his life in the face of all odds.

He returned from the room after what seemed an interminable age. I scanned his features eagerly, anxious to read the truth in his expression. What strange change had come over the man? He looked pale, weak, ill. I fancied his movements were laboured; occasionally he winced as if in pain.

With the fatal dagger in his hand he addressed his friends in Russian. I did not know what he said, but could see they all assented. Then turning to me he spoke again in English, which was certainly quite unintelligible to the others:

"I am supposed," he began, "to be telling you to prepare for death. When I raise my voice, show signs of emotion. The men will release you at my command. As I stab you, fall forward on your face, and do not stir beyond a shudder."

My eyes lit up with sudden hope.

"Don't look like that!" he exclaimed, and as he spoke my expression relaxed to one of feigned terror and abject despair.

"Be careful," he continued, "when carried out to show no sign, no movement. You will be buried, but rely on me to find means for preserving your life."

This speech was delivered with great deflection of voice for the benefit of those assembled. Then he turned and gave some orders in Russian, whereupon several men went out.

A conflicting multitude of fears and hopes swayed my mind; one moment I felt almost reassured, the next, knowing what difficulties and dangers must arise, my heart sank afresh.

Lurking doubts as to my champion made themselves felt, while I scanned the company curiously.

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What effect would the death of a fellow-creature have upon them? Could they witness it utterly unmoved?

Some turned pale, while their eyes shifted uneasily. One I noticed edged to the back, that he might look away without creating observation; others pushed forward gloatingly, a look of eager, almost hungry expectation on their faces, while their mouths gaped, and their bare red necks extended.

I could not analyse my own sensations, it all seemed like a ghastly nightmare, and I wondered if these blood-thirsty ruffians would fade before my eyes. Then tramping of feet outside, and the men returned, evidently having worked hard, for their sleeves were rolled up, their shirts open at the throat, and their boots clogged with moist earth.

I gathered from their appearance, they had been digging my grave.

I felt the cold beads of perspiration break out on my forehead, as I gazed at their soiled hands.

I believed my time had come!

My new-found friend advanced, and spoke again in measured tones:

"Are you nerved for what you have to go through?" he asked.

I bowed assent.

"I shall order the men to leave you, and trust to you to stand quiet and firm, apparently facing death without flinching. Any movement on your part may prove fatal."

A word from him in Russian, and I was free. Involuntarily I pulled myself together as if for a general scrimmage, but a moment's consideration, and I determined to place myself in the hands of this man, come what might.

Yet still the haunting thought returned. He might simply be acting a part to make my slaughter more easy.

My executioner approached, dagger in hand, and some of the strongest and fiercest men shrank back, showing some slight signs of emotion.

"I am going to feel under your shirt, to see, as they think, that there is nothing in the way of your heart," said my would-be saviour, "but in reality I shall place something to protect you."

I felt it touch my breast as he spoke, and drew myself up to tighten my clothes over whatever he had placed upon my heart.

My apparent bravery had a visible effect upon the audience. They muttered a smothered ejaculation.

"They are in a hurry," said the man with the dagger, "they could stand your shrieks, but are touched by your fortitude. Are you ready?"

My throat became dry and parched, a crimson mist rose before my eyes, my pulses quickened painfully. It was with difficulty I gasped the fatal word:

"Yes!"

A second that seemed like an hour—and the blow came! My head whirled, and a cry broke from my lips, just one gasp of mental agony, while a prick— a distinct prick warned me it was time to fall. One shudder—and I lay prostrate on the ground, uncertain still of my fate. Was I dead? No! my heart beat still, rapidly but surely. What was that red stream oozing from me on the floor? Blood! unmistakable blood, yet not from *my* veins. I felt no pain, no weakness. My supposed murderer bent down, and no doubt assured the others that I was dead, for the majority left the place hurriedly. I could hear them tramping away.

Quickly my friend's arms were round my chest, and others grasped my legs.

"Be very still," he whispered, as they raised me from the floor, and carried me out.

I could feel the cool air on my forehead, then a deep step down, and I was laid on the new turned soil in a shallow grave. But why so wide? The men dropped my legs and moved away.

"They have gone for your bicycle," quickly whispered the familiar voice. "I told them to bury that also to hide all trace. I shall lay it over you to keep off the weight of earth. The wheels lying flat fit on a ledge. Here is your broken indiarubber tyre, it will serve as a tube to introduce air, and keep you alive till I return."

He only just had time to say this, when the bicycle arrived, and was carefully placed over me, covered by a sack.

The end of the tube was in my mouth, concealed by the darkness of the night, while the earth was shovelled in, my friendly wheels carrying it bravely.

All was quiet, the stillness of death reigned, I lay consumed by horror in my gruesome grave, the tube working without interruption.

Every imaginable terror passed through my agonised mind, suffocation first, and then slow but sure starvation, should my rescuer fail. Every second I felt my breath must stop, I longed to move my cramped limbs, to raise myself, if but an inch.

How many hours—days—years were rolling over my head. Surely the earthy tomb had held me down through centuries of suffering.

I thought my heart was failing me, that insensibility was creeping on a-pace. The end that had only been postponed was coming, though I struggled to gasp on—on—just one more fleeting breath—and, then, oh! God——

What were those sounds above?

Fresh hope gave me fresh life. Someone was digging me out! Should I last till the blessed air fell on my fevered brow? How many spadefuls of earth before freedom—release! My mind began to wander. I fancied the accursed sod was in my mouth and eyes and ears! All the dead of many nations whispered hideous truths, and stretched out their skeleton arms to receive me. I pushed them back and shrieked aloud:

"Have mercy, God of Heaven! Spare! Spare!"

As if in answer, the cool breezes of night broke through this ghastly gloom. I opened my eyes, and the stars were shining down—the blessed stars, in the deep firmament above.

I stood on the green turf, trembling like an aspen leaf, white as a veritable corpse, clasping my deliverer's grimy hand.

"I am in the service of the police as a Nihilist," he explained in answer to my overwhelming gratitude. "I inform them when anything serious is about to occur. When I saw who had written your pass on the photograph, I determined to save you."

"And the blood?" I asked, feeling at my uninjured heart.

"That," he replied, "I got from my own body, and preserved it for the crucial moment in the tobacco pouch which I placed under your shirt."

I was speechless with wonder and thankfulness. He took me gently by the arm.

"No time to delay," he said. "Get at once to the town, and take the first train to the frontier. If you do this quickly, you will be safe."

Needless to say I took the hint at once, but before leaving, anxiously inquired how I could repay his marvellous service.

"Inform the signatory to your photograph how you were saved by No. 311." W. G.

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ASHIK KERIB.

A Turkish Story.

From the Russian of Lermontov.

Once upon a time, in the town of Tiflis, dwelt a wealthy Turk. Much gold had Allah given him; but dearer than gold to him was his only daughter, Magool Megéri. Lovely stars are in the sky; but above the stars are angels, and they are fairer still; even so Magool Megéri was fairer than all the daughters of Tiflis.

There was also living in Tiflis a poor man, Ashik Kerib. To him the Prophet had given nothing, except a lofty soul and the gift of song. Playing on the guitar, and praising the ancient heroes of Turkestan, he used to frequent weddings, to make merry for the fortunate and the rich. At one wedding he saw Magool Megéri, and they fell in love with one another. Small hope had Ashik Kerib of winning her hand, and he grew sad as the winter sky.

Well, once he lay in a garden under a vine, and at last he fell asleep. At that moment came by Magool Megéri, with her friends, and one of them espying Ashik Kerib, stopped and went up to him.

"Why sleepest thou beneath the vine?" she sang. "Arise, foolish one, thy gazelle is passing by!"

He awoke; the girl flitted away like a bird. Magool Megéri heard her song, and began to chide her.

"If thou knewest," she replied, "to whom I sang my song, thou wouldst be grateful; that is thy Ashik Kerib."

"Take me to him!" said Magool Megéri.

Seeing his sorrowful countenance, Magool Megéri began to speak and give him comfort.

"How can I help my grief," said Ashik Kerib; "I love thee, and thou wilt be never mine!"

"Ask my father for my hand," quoth she, "and my father will celebrate our wedding at his own charges, and will give me dower enough for both."

"Good," said he, "suppose Ayak Aga will grudge nothing to his daughter; but who knows that hereafter thou wilt not reproach me, saying that I had nothing, and owed everything to thee? No, gentle Magool Megéri, I have sworn an oath in my own heart; I vow for seven years to wander about the world, and to earn riches for myself; or else to die far away in the desert. If thou consent to this, when the set time comes to an end, thou shalt be mine."

She consented, but added thereto, that if on the appointed day he should not return, she would become the wife of Kurshid Bey, who had long been wooing her.

Came Ashik Kerib to his mother, received her blessing on his path, kissed his little sister, slung a wallet across his shoulder, and, leaning upon his traveller's staff, went forth from Tiflis town. And behold, a horseman overtakes him; he looks—'tis Kurshid Bey!

"Good journey to thee!" cries the Bey. "Go where thou wilt, I am thy comrade!"

No happy man was Ashik Kerib for his companion; but there was no help for it. Long did they journey together, and at last before them they saw a river. No bridge, no ford.

"Swim across," said Kurshid Bey—"I follow." Ashik Kerib folded his cloke, and swam. Once across, a glance behind him—O pity! O Almighty Allah! Kurshid Bey, seizing the cloke, was in full course back to Tiflis; only the dust was to be seen behind him, winding like a snake over the level plain. Arrived in Tiflis, the Bey takes Ashik Kerib's cloke to his old mother.

"Thy son has been drowned in a deep river," quoth he; "here is his cloke."

In woe unspeakable the mother fell upon the garment of her beloved son, and began to bathe it in hot tears; then she carried it to her who should have been her daughter, Magool Megéri.

"My son is drowned," she said. "Kurshid Bey has brought back his cloke; thou art free."

Magool Megéri smiled, and answered: "Believe it not; that is all the invention of Kurshid Bey. Until the seven years are up, no man shall be my husband."

From the wall she took down her guitar, and sang the beloved song of poor Ashik Kerib.

Meanwhile the traveller, barefoot and bareback, arrived at a village. Good folks clothed him and fed him; in return he sang them wonderful songs. In this fashion he passed from village to village, from town to town, and the fame of him spread abroad everywhere. At last he came to Khalaf. As usual, he proceeded to the coffee-house, asked for a guitar, began to sing. At that time there dwelt in Khalaf a Pasha, who was a great patron of singers. Many more they brought to him; not one of them found favour in his sight. His

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men were a-weary with going on the road. On a sudden, in passing by the coffee-house, they hear a marvellous voice. In they go.

"Either come with us to the great Pasha," they cried, "or thou answerest for it with thy head!"

"A free man am I, a stranger from Tiflis town," quoth Ashik Kerib; "as I will, I go; as I will, I go not; I sing when it suits me, and your Pasha is no master of mine." But, notwithstanding, they seized him and took him before the Pasha.

"Sing!" said the Pasha, and he began to sing. And in that song he praised his dear Magool Megéri, and that song so pleased the proud Pasha, that he kept poor Ashik Kerib with him. Gold and silver showered upon him; he gleamed in richest finery. Merry and happy was the life of Ashik Kerib, and he won great wealth. Did he forget his Magool Megéri, or not? I know not; but the time glided by. The last year must soon come to an end, but he made no preparation for his journey. Beautiful Magool Megéri began to despair. At that time a certain merchant was starting with a caravan from Tiflis, having forty camels and twice forty slaves. She called the merchant to her, and gave him a golden dish.

"Take this dish," said she, "and into what town soever thou shalt come, put this dish upon thy stall, and proclaim that he who claims my dish as the owner, and proves it, shall receive the dish, and withal, its weight in gold."

Off went the merchant; everywhere he fulfilled the behest of Magool Megéri, but no one laid claim to the golden dish. At last he had sold nigh all his wares, and with the residue he came to Khalaf. He proclaimed everywhere the bidding of Magool Megéri. Hearing of this, Ashik Kerib repairs to the caravanserai, and there he sees the golden dish on the stall of the Tiflis merchant.

"That is mine!" said he, taking it up in his hand.

"Thine, truly," said the merchant, "I recognise thee, Ashik Kerib. Get thee at once to Tiflis; thy Magool Megéri bade say to thee that the time is running out, and if thou be not there on the appointed day, she will go to another." In despair, Ashik Kerib smote his head; of the time appointed but three days remained. Howbeit, he mounted upon his horse, taking with him a parcel of gold, and away he galloped, not sparing the horse. At last the tired steed fell lifeless on Arzinyan Hill, which is between Arzinyan and Erzeroom. What was he to do? From Arzin to Tiflis was two months' journey, and there remained but two days.

"Almighty Allah!" he cried, "if thou helpest me not now, there is nothing I can do in all the world!" And he made as though to cast himself over a high precipice. Suddenly he sees beneath a man on a white horse, hears a loud voice.

"Youth, what wouldst thou do?"

"I would die," says Ashik Kerib.

"If so, come down here, and I will kill thee." Ashik Kerib somehow got down the precipice.

"Follow behind me," sternly said the horseman.

"How can I follow thee?" said Ashik Kerib. "Thy steed flies like the wind, and I am burdened with my gold."

"True. Put thy gold upon my saddle, and follow." Ashik Kerib stood still, as though he did not mean to move. "Why standest still?" asked the rider.

"Because I cannot follow after thee; thy steed is quicker than thought, and I am weary."

"True. Sit behind me on the horse, and tell me the whole truth; whither wouldst thou go?"

"If I could only get as far as Erzeroom to-day," replied Ashik.

"Shut thy eyes, then."

He shut them.

"Now open."

Ashik looked: before him were the white walls and gleaming minarets of Erzeroom.

"Guilty, Aga!" quoth Ashik. "I have sinned! I would have said that I must to Kars."

"So, so," answered the horseman, "I warned thee to tell the whole truth. Shut thy eyes again! Now open."

Ashik can hardly believe his eyes, that this is Kars. He fell on his knees, and said: "Guilty, Aga! thrice guilty thy servant Ashik Kerib; but thou knowest that if a man makes up his mind to lie in the morning, lie he must till night. In every truth I must needs to Tiflis!"

"How little is thy faith!" said the horseman, much in wrath; "but there's nothing for it, I forgive thee. Shut thy eyes. Now open," after a minute.

Ashik cried aloud for joy; they stood at the gates of Tiflis. Offering the thanks of his heart, and taking his gold from the saddle, Ashik Kerib said to the horseman: "Aga, of a truth thy goodness is great; but grant me yet one other boon. If I now tell how in one day I came from Arzinyan to Tiflis, no man will believe me; do thou give me some sign."

"Stoop down," said the other smiling; "take from under my horse's hoof a clod of earth, and put it in thy bosom; if they will not believe the truth of thy words, bid them bring thee a blind woman that has been seven years without sight, smear it on her eyes, and she shall see."

Ashik took a clod of earth from under the hoof of the white horse; but when he raised his head, horse and man had vanished. Then he knew in his soul that his protector was none other than St. George.

It was late in the evening before Ashik Kerib found himself at his own home. He knocked at the door with trembling hand, saying: "Mother, mother, open! I am God's guest; I am cold and hungry; I pray for the sake of thy wandering son, let me in!" The weak voice of the old dame made answer: "For lodging there are the houses of the rich and mighty; there is a wedding now in the town, thither wend: there thou canst pass the night in merriment."

"Mother," quoth he, "here I have no acquaintance, and therefore I repeat my prayer: for the sake of thy wandering son, let me in!" Then said his sister to her mother: "Mother, I will rise and open the door to him."

Says the mother: "Worthless girl! thou art glad to receive young men, and show them hospitality, because it is now seven years since I went blind for weeping."

But the daughter, nought heeding her reproaches, opened the door and let in Ashik Kerib. With the usual greeting, he sat down, and began to look about him with secret emotion. And this is what he saw on the wall, in a dusty wrapper—his sweet-toned guitar; and he asked his mother: "What is that hanging upon the wall?"

Quoth she: "Inquisitive guest, be content if there is a piece of bread for thee, and to-morrow go with God's blessing."

"I have already told thee," said he, "thou art my own mother, and this my sister; and therefore I ask thee to declare what this should be hanging upon the wall."

"That is a guitar, a guitar," angrily answered the old dame, believing not a word.

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"But what may that be, a guitar?"

"A guitar is that on which they play, and sing songs to it."

Then he begged her to bid his sister take down the guitar and show it to him.

"It cannot be," replied the old woman; "that is the guitar of my unhappy son, and now 'tis seven years it has been hanging there, and no living hand has touched it." But his sister arose and took down the guitar and gave it to him. Then uplifting his eyes to Heaven, he uttered this prayer.

"Oh, Almighty Allah! If I am to attain to my desire, then may my seven-stringed lute be in tune, as on that day when last I played upon it!" Then he smote upon the copper strings, and the strings rang out harmonious; and he began to sing:

"A poor wanderer I, and my words are poor; but the great St. George hath helpen me to climb down the steep precipice. Although I am poor, and poor my words, know me, mother, thy wandering son!"

After this his mother began to weep, and bespake him: "How do they name thee?"

"Trueheart," he answered.

"Speak once, listen oft, Trueheart," said she. "By thy speech thou hast torn my heart in pieces. This very night in my sleep I saw that on my head the hair is white. 'Tis now seven years since I went blind for weeping. Tell me, thou that hast his voice, when will my son return?"

And twice with tears she repeated her request. In vain he declared himself to be her son, she believed him not. And after some time he asked her:

"Thy leave, mother dear, to take the guitar and go out. I have heard that hard by they have a wedding; my sister will lead the way. I will play and sing, and all that I earn I will bring back here and share it with you."

"I will not grant thee leave," replied the dame. "Ever since my son is not, his guitar has not passed out of my house."

Then he began to swear that he would not hurt a single string. "But if even one string break," went on Ashik, "I will answer for it with all that I have."

The old woman felt his parcel of gold, and finding that it was full of coins, she let him go. Leading him to the rich house, where were the sounds of the wedding feast, his sister waited by the door to hear what should happen.

In that house lived Magool Megéri, and on that night she must become the wife of Kurshid Bey. Kurshid Bey was feasting with his kinsfolk; but Magool Megéri, seated behind a curtain with her companions, held in one hand a cup of poison, and in the other hand a keen dagger. She had sworn to die before she would stoop to become the wife of Kurshid Bey. And from amongst the group of girls, she heard how a stranger came in, who said:

"Salaam aleikam! Here ye are making merry and feasting, so grant to me, a poor stranger, to sit with you, and in return I will sing to you a song."

"Why not?" said Kurshid Bey. "Here should be open house for singers and dancers, for here is a wedding feast. Sing something, minstrel, and I will reward thee with a handful of gold."

Then Kurshid Bey asked him: "But how do they name thee, wayfarer?"

"Soon-will-ye-know."

"What kind of name is that?" asked the other with a laugh; "that name I never heard before."

Then he took his guitar, and began to sing:

"In the town of Khalaf I drank wine; but God gave me wings, and I flew hither in three days."

The brother of Kurshid Bey, a man of little wit, drew his sword, shouting: "Thou liest! How is it possible to travel from Khalaf hither in three days?"

"Why wouldst thou kill me?" said Ashik. "Minstrels are wont to foregather from all the four quarters of the earth; believe me, believe me not, I rob you of nothing."

Quoth the bridegroom: "Let him go on," and Ashik Kerib sang again.

"Morning prayer I said in the vale of Arzinyan, and midday prayer on the hill of Erzeroom; before the setting of the sun I said my prayer on the hill of Kars, and at evening I prayed in Tiflis. Allah gave me wings, and I flew hither; God grant that I might sacrifice my life for the white horse! He galloped swift, like a dancer on the rope, from hill to valley, from valley to hill; our Lord gave wings to Ashik, and he flew to the wedding of Magool Megéri."

Then Magool Megéri knew his voice: she threw poison one way, knife the other. "And that is how thou keepest thine oath!" said a friend to her; "is it so, that this night thou wilt be wife to Kurshid Bey?"

"Ye knew it not, but I knew the voice so sweet to me," replied Magool Megéri; and seizing a knife, she rent the curtain through. No sooner had she looked and recognised her Ashik Kerib, she cried aloud and threw herself on his neck, and both fell down in a swoon. At them with his sword leapt the brother of Kurshid Bey, to thrust them through; but Kurshid Bey stayed him, saying:

"Calm thyself, and know, that from a man's birth 'tis written in his forehead, that which he cannot avoid."

When she came to herself, Magool Megéri blushed for shame; she hid her face in her hands, and retired behind the curtain.

"Now it is truly clear that thou art Ashik Kerib," said the bridegroom; "but explain how in so short a time thou couldst accomplish such a journey?"

"In proof of my truthfulness," quoth Ashik, "my sabre will cut through a stone; if I lie, my neck shall be thinner than a hair. But best of all, bring me a blind woman, who for seven years has not seen God's world, and I will restore her sight." Ashik Kerib's sister, standing in the hall beside the door, heard this speech, and went for her mother.

"Mother mine!" cried she, "that is truly my brother and truly thy son, Ashik Kerib!" and taking the old dame by the hand, she led her to the wedding-feast.

Then Ashik Kerib took out of his bosom the clod of earth, mixed it with water and anointed his mother's eyes, saying: "Know, all people, what is the might and greatness of St. George!" and his mother received her sight. After that durst no man doubt the truth of his report, and Kurshid Bey silently yielded him the beautiful Magool Megéri.

Then in his joy Ashik Kerib said to him: "Hearken, Kurshid Bey, I have a gift for thee. My sister is no less worthy than thy former bride; I am rich, and she will have silver and gold no less; so take her to thee, and be ye as happy together as I am with my beloved Magool Megéri."

W. H. D. Rouse.

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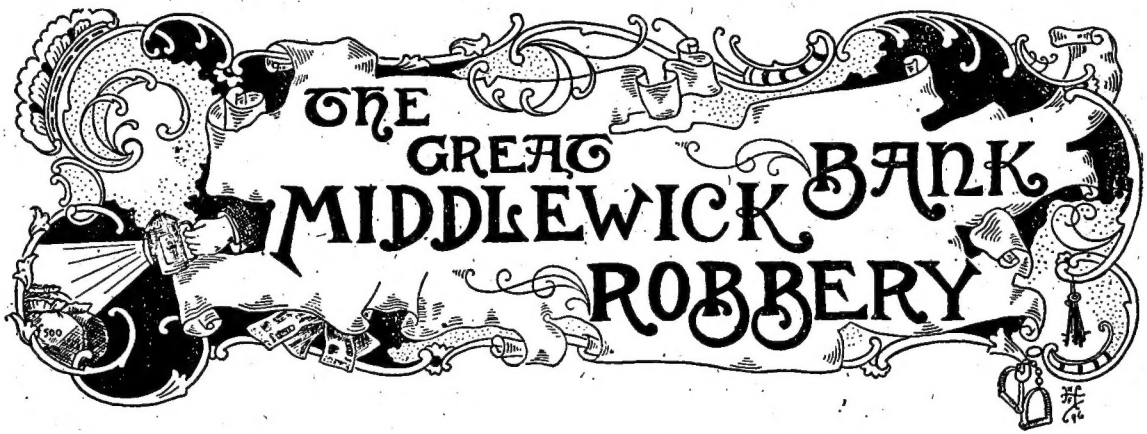

SUMMARY.

Mr. Bryant, *Manager of Middlewick Bank.*
Herbert Stewart, *Cashier.*
Frank Rutherford, *Book-keeper.*
Alfred Taylor, *Detective.*
John Warren, *Old Watchman.*
Jack Burton, *New Watchman—a detective in disguise.*
Miss Denton, *Bryant's niece, and in love with Rutherford.*

£20,000 is stolen from the Bank one night while John Warren is asleep. The only persons apparently aware of the key to the combination lock are Mr. Bryant and Mr. Stewart. Taylor interviews Mr. Bryant and the new watchman, Jack Burton, who, by his movements, appears to be a colleague of Taylor, unknown to Mr. Bryant. Taylor is led to suspect Frank Rutherford of having obtained the key to the lock, and shadows him. He visits the Bank during the night to talk matters over with his colleague, Jack Burton, and while there Mr. Bryant comes in, and Taylor hides. After he has gone, and as Taylor is leaving, they see a figure watching the Bank.

CHAPTER V.

I must Do my Duty.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and the figure at the opposite corner did not leave his post of observation.

"We'll easily tire him out," said the detective; "he'll have to give in before morning."

"Hush! he is impatient already."

In the uncertain light of the lamp near the corner, the faint outline of a man could now and then be discerned, standing well back in the shadow of the building. As if tired of standing in one position so long, the stranger changed his pose, thus enabling the watchers to observe him in the gloom.

Suddenly he stepped plainly into view, and hurried round the corner, taking precisely the opposite course from that of the man whom the detective attempted to follow.

"Now, Alf," whispered the watchman, opening the door so rapidly that it moved without the slightest sound.

Without a word the detective slipped through and was after the individual who had so long tried their patience.

Taylor made no mistake this time, for the street was sufficiently well lighted to allow him to keep his man in sight. But though the hour was late, the couple were not the only ones abroad. Other pedestrians were astir, some going away from and some approaching the detective. Had the one whom he was shadowing known the fact, he could easily have eluded his pursuer by wheeling about and taking the reverse course; but evidently he was unaware of the figure behind him, and every minute lessened the possibility of his escaping him.

At the second turning, the one in advance turned to the left. Taylor immediately broke into a run, decreasing by at least one half the distance between them. When at last he turned the corner he was not more than fifty yards behind the other, who was so plainly in sight that the pursuer was sure of him.

Taylor had already recognised him as Mr. Frank Rutherford, whom he had shadowed earlier in the evening.

"Hulloa!" muttered the detective, as the the other made a second turn, which brought him in sight of Mr. Bryant's residence; "this has a queer look. Surely he can't intend making a late call?"

Taylor now thought it best to slip across the street, and he did so without being noticed. The other, so far as he could judge, did not look round—proof that he had no suspicion of the individual who was keeping so close to him.

Once again the pursuer increased the distance between them. Though there was little lamplight, the moon gave enough illumination for all purposes; and if the book-keeper discovered who was following him, the game would be up, at least so far as Taylor was concerned.

Slower and slower became the pace, until, when nearly opposite "Glenmora," the one in advance halted. He now looked round as if to make sure that no one was in sight; but the detective, no novice at his profession, had anticipated this act and shrank so close to the houses that he was in no danger of being seen.

"He is watching Mr. Bryant's house," was Taylor's conclusion; "he expects to see something, and *he* is expected, too."

Darkness reigned in the first floor of Mr. Bryant's residence, but a light was still burning in one of the upper rooms, the blind of one window of which had not been drawn down. That there was someone on the watch in that apartment was proved by the action of the young man, though the detective, with all his acuteness, could not discover what it was that guided the person standing near the gate.

Rutherford drew a match from his pocket and lit a cigar, at which he puffed vigorously until the end was aglow. Then, when certain that the crimson point could be seen, he raised it above his head, still facing the house, and circled it several times from left to right, the same number of times in reverse order, and then repeated the first gyration.

At the moment of completing the last circle, the light in the upper room of "Glenmora" was extinguished, and all became perfect darkness.

"That's a proof that the signal of the young gentleman was seen and understood," was Taylor's conclusion; "though the person on the look-out up there took good care to keep out of sight."

All his interest now centred in the young book-keeper on the opposite side of the street, who, having completed the errand which had taken him to "Glenmora," turned and leisurely retraced his steps.

The detective waited until he was secure from observation, and then followed the young man at a safe distance until he reached the home which Taylor had held under surveillance earlier in the evening, at the time he met with his adventure with the policeman who mistook him for a burglar.

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While it was hardly natural for one to return so soon to the scene of his escape, the detective made sure that no one was on the watch for him before trusting himself near the shop from whose door he had darted in such haste.

As it was, he held aloof until he saw the young man enter the gate to his home. The light was still aglow in the upper room from the window of which he had seen the mother look out. A few minutes after the son's entrance it went out, and the whole house was in darkness.

"That disposes of Mr. Rutherford for to-night," said the watcher to himself.

Despite the lateness of the hour, the detective returned to his hotel by way of the bank, scrutinising the building closely as he passed.

If he meditated making another call upon the watchman, the detective changed his mind, at the sight of a policeman, and walked with as brisk a pace as was prudent to the hotel. He had been up the best part of the preceding night, and therefore determined to make the best use of his time by securing the opportunity to rest which now offered itself.

Taylor's first proceeding in the morning was to visit Mr. Bryant at his private residence. From the manager's own lips he had learned that it was seldom he was at the bank before eleven o'clock, but so thoroughly had the burglary roused him out of his usual routine that the caller found him ready to start. After greeting his visitor pleasantly, Mr. Bryant led the way to the library for a talk.

"I suppose it is too early for you to have discovered anything yet?" remarked the host.

"Yes. I was pretty tired and thought the best preparation for a good day's work was a refreshing night's rest, so I took it."

"That was wise. I can't say that I was as fortunate for this matter bears so heavily on my mind that my slumber is much broken. I went to the bank again last night, a little before midnight."

"May I inquire the cause of *that?*"

"I was nervous. What you said about the new watchman made me so distrustful that I decided to visit him unexpectedly."

"I thought," remarked Taylor with a smile, "that after reading Mr. Cartwright's letter I congratulated you on having so trustworthy a fellow."

"So you did; but it was the doubt in your face when I first told you what I had done that disturbed me."

"Well, how did you find things?"

"First class. The new man is a treasure. He made me show myself before he would admit me, and then coolly said that if I hadn't done as he requested he would have shot me."

"That's the kind of man you want, and Mr. Cartwright knew what he was doing when he recommended him to you."

"Yes, and I shall have no further apprehension on *that* score."

"But," said the detective, more gravely than he had yet spoken. "The reason for my visit this morning is, I wish to speak to you about your book-keeper—Rutherford, I believe is his name."

Taylor observed a dull flush overspread the banker's face as he asked:

"And what of *him?*"

"You must be aware he is one of the parties about whom—ah—it is my duty to make some inquiries."

"I should sooner suspect my niece upstairs than him."

This remark impressed the detective oddly in view of what he had witnessed the preceding night.

"You told me yesterday that you have never had occasion to distrust him."

"Never; he is the only child of a widowed mother, as I told you, and a more devoted son never breathed. It would break her heart if any ill befel him."

"I sincerely hope nothing of the kind will occur. But, in order to do my full duty, I must be thorough. Can you furnish me with a specimen of Mr. Rutherford's handwriting?"

Mr. Bryant looked fixedly in the face of his caller for some seconds without speaking. The detective calmly returned the gaze, each countenance motionless but expressive.

"Don't ask me any questions, please," added Taylor in a low voice; "but if you can, do as I request."

The host sat silent a minute longer, and then, without a word, rose and walked to his desk. He fumbled among some papers until he found the one for which he was searching. Then he walked towards the detective with the letter in his hand.

"Last Christmas the directors, on my recommendation, decided to make an advance in Mr. Rutherford's salary. As an appropiate Yuletide present I sent him this letter, and here is his acknowledgment, written in such good taste that I filed it away. I will lend it to you for a few days, if you wish."

"Many thanks. To make the matter complete," added Taylor, after glancing hastily over the missive, "yours ought to keep it company. I observe they are fastened together, and it is just as well not to separate them."

"Mr. Rutherford, of course, has the notification which I sent, and, I presume, treasures it highly. The one you have there is merely the rough draft of the letter I was instructed to write. Under the circumstances, I did something more than indite a formal communication. It seems to me the case called for it. What do *you* think?"

"Mr. Rutherford's reply is so grateful and well expressed, dwelling on the manner in which you have referred to his services, that I have some curiosity to peruse your own letter."

All men have their weak points. The detective had touched that of the banker, who plainly was pleased by the delicate flattery of his visitor. Truth to tell, Mr. Bryant had spent a good deal of labour on his letter and was proud of the result. With some protestations, therefore, he allowedhis visitor to retain both the documents after exacting a promise from him that he would return them in a few days.

A footstep in the room above suddenly recalled to the

"May I inquire the cause of that?"

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Bade her an affectionate good-bye.

detective's mind another point on which he was in want of information. Mr. Bryant's library was immediately below the room in which the light had shone the night before when someone within awaited the signal of Mr. Rutherford's cigar.

"Have you children visiting in the house, Mr. Bryant?" he inquired.

"No; why do you ask?"

"I just now heard someone in your room overhead, and from the lightness of the footstep concluded it was a child."

"That is my niece. My room is at the back, where I am not so liable to be disturbed by the street traffic."

Mr. Taylor had gained the knowledge he sought.

The two rose to their feet, preparatory to leaving the house, when the same dainty footfall sounded on the stairs. Mr. Bryant stepped into the hall, where he kissed his ward and bade her an affectionate good-bye. The detective respectfully loitered behind, but as he followed his host through the front door he managed to obtain a glimpse of the girl, who, of course, was, the lady he had seen the night before.

"A woman's instinct is unerring," reflected Taylor, as he walked beside the banker down the winding gravelled path to the street. "Can it be that she has any suspicion of my purpose in paying such an early morning visit? I have learned that a tender feeling exists between her and the bookkeeper of the bank, and that the proud uncle is not averse to it. He must think very highly of the young man thus to encourage their love. I hope it will not be my fate to bring sorrow upon the couple; but, if so, it will not be the first I have been compelled to strike, and I must do my duty—I must do my duty."

CHAPTER VI.

"What's to be Done?"

Mr. Taylor felt that he had secured a number of threads floating and drifting within his reach, which, if rightly handled, could be woven into something.

While he had not yet settled upon the one who was the guilty party, he had picked up several important clues. A man in his position needs to avoid the fatal mistake of jumping to conclusions without proper evidence. One of the pitfalls of the detective is to set out with a certain theory and then try to force his facts to fit his beliefs instead of following the opposite course in his investigations.

There should be no theory at all at the beginning of the case except a very general one. As the discoveries appear, they will of themselves suggest the proper line of thought. On the other hand, it is impossible not to form a suspicion with the first glimmer of truth.

Suspicion in this case pointed to Frank Rutherford, the book-keeper of the Middlewick Bank, and all that had been learned so far strengthened that suspicion. But the most lamentable part of the belief formed by the professional was that Miss Denton, the accomplished niece of the bank manager, was implicated with the wrong-doer, if indeed she were not an actual accomplice in the crime.

The words which Taylor had overheard, their manner

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when together, and, above all, that singular signalling between them when the young man returned from his station opposite his bank, where he had been on the watch for more than an hour: all these pointed unerringly in a single direction.

True the partnership of a beautiful and accomplished young lady of the highest character in a bank burglary was was almost beyond credence. In all his experience the detective had never known anything of the kind. But the sagacious Taylor was ever ready with a charitable explanation which virtually absolved her from guilt.

It was he, Rutherford, her lover and admirer, who had planned and plotted the whole thing. He had taken her into his confidence, and through her affection for him, she had yielded. The deed being done, regret and repentance followed, when they promised to be too late.

The detective grimly closed his lips and resolved again that he would do his duty with no regard for the consequences to anyone.

From Mr. Bryant's residence he went to his hotel. He decided to meet Burton that they might compare notes and consult together. He expected to find him waiting at the hotel, but saw nothing of him. Taylor knew where he lodged, but preferred not to go there fearing to attract attention to the watchman.

"Mr. Rollett" made inquiries if any letters had come for him, but there were none. Disappointed, he ascended to his room on the second floor. Sitting down at the window which overlooked the street he immediately made a startling discovery.

He saw a man walking slowly on the opposite side, smoking a cigar and swinging a walking stick, something after the manner of the detective himself. He gave one the impression of being a person who had nothing special on hand and had only to dawdle away the hours. Just opposite the hote this individual met another person of ordinary appearancel also smoking, but, instead of carrying a stick, he kept both, hands in his trousers pockets.

They passed as though strangers, neither appearing to recognise the other. And yet, as the detective well knew, they were intimate associates, or rather confederates in crime. Those two were desperate criminals, and had been concerned in some of the most sensational burglaries in the country. It was they who were concerned in the robbery of a county bank in the North of England when the faithful cashier was shot and one of the clerks crippled for life. And yet the cunning miscreants managed the affair so skilfully that it was impossible to convict them. One was Joe Nash, and the other, Will King. Each travelled under half-a-dozen aliases, but those names were the ones by which they were best known to the authorities.

One quick glance, as he saw them in the sunlight, left no doubt of their identity. Taylor knew them as well as he did the watchman, but the question which overwhelmed the detective was as to the cause of the presence of these two criminals in Middlewick on this day in May.

Had it been several days earlier, the explanation would have been self-evident. They were there to plan and carry out the robbery of the bank, but that had already been accomplished. The whole thing was one of those mysterious phases of crime which often baffle the most expert detective. Only one conclusion seemed reasonable, that was that they were in collusion with the book-keeper and were staying in Middlewick to complete the division of the plunder. The entrance to the bank was so simple that they needed no help. Having the combination given to them by Rutherford, it was comparatively easy to do the rest.

This, it seemed, was the only explanation which could be formulated, but it was far from satisfactory. The principal objection was that if ever Nash and King succeeded in robbing a bank, they would never wait to divide with any partner. The theory pre-supposed that they had done the actual burglarising, and that being the case they would have wasted no time in Middlewick after completing the work.

But it was a waste of time thus to speculate. Taylor felt that Burton must be seen without delay. Enough has been told to show their joint interests in unearthing the guilty ones—an interest which was to continue to the end.

But the detective preserved his coolness. He didn't forget that while the two criminals were so well known to him, he also was known to them and sure of recognition in the event of meeting them undisguised.

With the facilities always at command, he made a number of changes in his appearance. Confident that the men, as yet, were unaware of his presence in the little country town, he retained the business suit he had worn from the first. The changes in his looks were comparatively slight. Taylor was a man who relied much upon his power of facial expression. He could do wonders in that line. Then, by assuming an altogether different bearing the contrast was more effective than that which could be made by dye, false hair, beard, and the ordinary contrivances used by the amateur. Besides, if he had the metamorphosis too marked it was liable to cause him trouble with the hotel proprietor.

But Taylor found no difficulty in mixing with the other guests without attracting attention. Sauntering to the desk, he glanced over the visitors' book; neither Nash nor King had subscribed under any name. It followed, therefore, that their headquarters were somewhere else, and as the Middlewick House was the only hotel in the place, they must have taken rooms. Since also the criminals took opposite directions, it would seem that it was easy for the detective to track one of them.

Confident in doing so, he sauntered forward, somewhat after his manner of the night before, but, at the end of an hour, hadn't caught sight of either. They had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them.

It was indispensable, for reasons which will duly appear, that he should see Burton without delay, so, despite the reluctance to go to his lodgings, Taylor hurried thither.

The new watchman made his home with a humble couple, an old man and his wife who had no other lodgers. Much to the detective's relief, he found his friend within and went up to his room unannounced. The watchman glanced up with a smile, when he noticed the changes Taylor had made in his looks. He further judged that something unusual had taken place.

"I was there."

"I expected you at the hotel," was the somewhat dissatisfied remark of the visitor.

"I was there."

"When?"

"About half-an-hour ago."

"Then you must have called after I left?"

"Well, it was not my fault that I did not see you."

"But why didn't you come earlier?"

"I did."

"When?"

"Rather over an hour ago."

"That was while I was at Mr. Bryant's house."

"It strikes me, Alf, that if you expect a friend to call at your place you ought to be in to receive him."

"I have nothing to say on that point. But Burton, what do you think?"

"A good many things when the necessity arises. You seem agitated over something."

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"I have reason to be. Joe Nash and Will King are here."

"I knew it."

"You did? Why didn't you tell me?"

"My dear fellow, I have just explained that I called twice to give you the news, but didn't find you in. Then I came home to get ready for to-night; if I'm not mistaken things will be stirring."

"What do you make of it?"

Instead of replying Burton smiled and said:

"I will answer you after you have given me *your* explanation."

The detective gave the theory already stated, to the effect that the two criminals had had a hand in the burglary of a couple of nights before, and were staying in Middlewick to complete the business with their confederate, Frank Rutherford.

But Burton shook his head. "That won't do, Alf. You're altogether on the wrong track."

"Well, then, set me right."

"I don't know that I can. A little thought, however, will soon convince you that it is impossible for you to be correct."

"We won't argue the matter—I'll give in; but let me hear what you think of it."

Burton lit his pipe, and leant back in his chair.

"To my mind this business has taken the strangest turn of anything in which I was ever engaged."

"I formed that opinion before I met you to-day."

"I know, or at least suspect, to what you refer, but I believe that Nash and King are in Middlewick for the purpose of robbing the bank."

"The dickens! There must be mighty little left of which to rob it."

"Quite right, but that's where the joke comes in. They have looked over the ground before selecting this place for their attention. The sleepy watchman, the old-fashioned lock—all the conditions were so favourable that they naturally fixed upon the Middlewick Bank as one of the easiest in the country to be cracked. But that was days before the recent robbery."

"Then they have planned to rob a bank that has just been robbed?"

"Precisely."

"And, of course, do not suspect that they are a day too late for the fair?"

Burton lit his pipe.

"That's my belief. The secret has been better kept than one would have supposed, considering it is known to so many."

"There isn't a policeman in the town that suspects it. Neither Joe Nash, Will King, or Sam Birch dream of such a thing."

"Sam Birch; what has *he* to do with the business?"

"He's here too."

"Anybody else?"

"That's the lot; I've seen them all."

"And have they seen *you*?"

"No; I was lucky. You know before I left home I did all the disguising necessary, for it might be awkward to work up any changes after taking a situation as watchman. The manager might mistake me for a burglar."

"You're right. Your own mother would hardly know you now."

"For all that, however, I fought shy of these three gentlemen and am sure they have not the slightest idea of my being here."

"They're not staying at the hotel."

"No, I know that. They are stopping at a house in the town."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know. They're too sharp to give themselves away at this stage of the game. I tried to find out, but had to give it up. You're pretty well disguised, Alf, suppose you undertake that job."

"I'll try it, of course, but doubt if I'll succeed. You are sure they have no suspicion that you're playing watchman?"

"I don't think so. I should feel insulted if I thought they did."

"They will try the bank to-night—that is, if any reliance can be placed upon appearances."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well," remarked the amazed detective, "this is a joke. I have heard of a man trying to shoot with a gun, forgetting that it has already been discharged, but I never knew of a gang of burglars attempting to rob a bank which has already been robbed."

"Nor have I. We seem in a fair way to establish some precedents before we are fairly through with this business."

"What's to be done?"

"Why, nab them, of course."

"How?"

"What can be more simple when we know their plans? These gentry generally make their calls about midnight or one o'clock. We'll be ready for them, Alf."

The detective was silent for a minute or two.

"Do you think we ought to undertake it alone?"

"I have seriously considered that point. If there were but two, I wouldn't ask for any better amusement, but we shall find it difficult to handle three, that is so as to make sure of capturing them all. I don't want any to get away."

"But what is your plan?"

"We must take the police superintendent into our confidence. From what I've heard of him, I think he's a sensible fellow. We'll get him to let us have two of his best men. We'll place them inside the bank, or within reach; then, at the right minute, we'll close in. What's simpler?"

"The scheme seems a good one, as it should be coming from *you*; but we ought to have something in the nature of a rehearsal. You will take your place as usual to play the watchman?"

"No. I think I will put the old watchman, Warren, on duty again."

"And why?"

"You must remember that our three friends have founded their campaign on the belief that the sleepy old fellow is still in charge. If they see me go in instead they may postpone the business until they have time to investigate, and when they investigate, and find that the business has already been done for them, they'll decide not to waste any more time."

"Will you explain to Mr. Bryant?"

"Not until it's over. He'll ask too many questions, and is already so upset that he will be sure to 'bungle' matters, and, more than likely, give the whole show away. I'll go to Warren himself, and let him think the manager intends giving him another trial. The only trouble is, he will be pretty likely to keep awake when I specially want him to go to sleep. He will be so anxious to regain his character that he will be supernaturally vigilant. I shouldn't be surprised if he showed fight, thereby rendering it necessary for the visitors to give him a pretty good whack over the head to quiet him."

"It will serve him right—that is, if the crack isn't too hard, and those fellows wouldn't hesitate about giving him one."

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"The power of habit is strong, so I think after all Warren will spend the night as he has been accustomed to spend it for the last twelve years. Anyhow, I'll take the chances."

"Well, since that's settled, let's fix the particulars. Shall I see the Police Superintendent?"

"Yes, arrange with him, and I'll manage about the watchman."

"What of placing the policemen inside the bank?"

"Easy enough to do that. The trio won't appear in the neighbourhood until the night is well advanced. One of them may take a walk past about ten o'clock, just to assure himself that everything is straight; but we'll get the men in before that."

"What will Warren think?"

"More than likely he'll be snoring by that time. If he isn't, he'll be told that suspicious characters have been seen about, and that we think it best he should have company. He won't object."

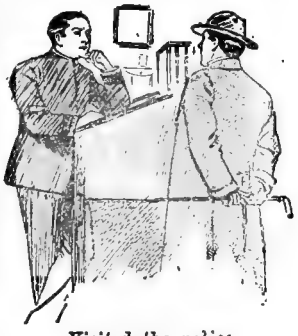
"Who generally keeps watch?"

"Sam Birch—that's his business. He's awfully good at it, too."

The plan outlined by Burton was followed as closely as possible. He and the detective divided the work between them, and each understood his own and the other's part.

Taylor, keeping a sharp look out for the burglars, visited the police superintendent and explained matters. The official proved to be an intelligent gentleman, who proffered all the assistance in his power. He called in two of his best men, before whom the matter was laid, and eagerly entered into.

They were to saunter by the bank precisely at nine o'clock that evening. Burton—whose appearance Taylor minutely described—would stroll past at the same moment on the other side of the street, returning as it were from a reconnaissance of the enemy's lines. If he took off his hat and wiped his forehead, it would mean that the coast was clear, and they were to enter the bank without hesitation. If, on the other hand, he did not remove his hat, they were to saunter past without giving any attention to the bank or seemingly to the watchman. This manœuvre was to be repeated precisely fifteen minutes later, and, if necessary, at similar intervals until the way should open.



Visited the police superintendent.

Warren within would be instructed to keep the door unlocked until the police entered. Once inside the building they were to place themselves as their judgment suggested best to make sure of capturing the criminals. Taylor and Burton would remain outside until they heard a prearranged signal from the policeman within. It was the wish of the couple to secure Sam Birch—one of the most notorious burglars of the day.

He would be on the watch outside, and the instant he suspected what was going on, would take good care to save himself, his position being such that he could easily do so.

Having duly arranged the preliminaries, Taylor and Burton sent out to put them in execution, neither dreaming of the astounding complications which were to ensue in the course of that eventful night.

(To be continued.)

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A CASE IN COVENTRY

If success in life is realising our dreams, as someone defines it, I may be permitted to boast of a certain measure of success, for my dearest dream when a boy was to make a tour through England on foot, and I was little more than twenty-one when I left London to carry out that project.

I was fresh from my books, had a splendid stock of money, and a large assortment of enthusiasm, good health, and small experience, and these combined with youth to make a very good imitation of happiness, especially when you are realising your dream all the while.

The time of my wanderings was not restricted by anything but my resources, so I loitered away whole weeks in pretty out-of-the-way spots and grey old historic towns, saturating myself with their feeling and refreshing my memory about their traditions, acting these out with my imagination in their proper settings before my bodily eyes in approved young tourist fashion.

I found abundant entertainment of my favourite sort in Coventry. Little Grayfriars' Hospital, untouched, unchanged since the Middle Ages, used to occupy a good deal of my attention, partly for its own sake, and partly for the sake of the cement and wood of which it is built, which vividly recalled Shakespeare's house to my mind.

I rummaged in the library, revelling particularly in an edition of "Fox's Martyrs," nine volumes, folio, with facsimiles of the original plates. "Fox's Martyrs" had been my Sunday reading when I was a small boy; the grim, creepy language used to give me a choice sensation of horror, to which I never became *blasé*, although here in Coventry the volumes only looked like kindly remembrancers of home. They burned people at the stake in Coventry as late as in any part of England. Godcake was the singular name of the place where the poor people were roasted, a place where they could look up to the church spires, the calm, senseless symbols of the faith they were dying for—and by.

The library was my favourite haunt, and there the fixed attention a queer little old man used to bestow upon me ended by attracting mine to him. We were soon on speaking terms, and found each other mutually amusing. My being an American seemed an endless source of wonder and curiosity to him, and his eccentricity, abruptness, and fund of odd information delighted me. One day he said to me, in his queer fashion:

"The last man gibbeted in England was gibbeted in Coventry."

"What is gibbeting?" I asked.

"Hanging a man to a tree till the birds eat him," he answered with a sort of ghastly relish.

I thought of Macbeth's threat to his messenger:

> Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive
> Till famine cling thee,

which my ear first caught: "Till famine *clean* thee," and this was so exhaustively graphic to my early imagination, that I had brought myself to give it up with great difficulty.

"I can tell you a very queer incident about this place, and one of its customs," he continued. "Have you ever heard of Lady Godiva?"

I blushed and bit my thumb, and coyly admitted so much sophistication.

"Perhaps you know, then," resumed the old man, "that here in Coventry, up to within a few years, it has been the custom to celebrate her famous ride by a procession, at the head of which rides a woman personating Lady Godiva, and imitating her costume as far as the police will permit. All guilds and societies used to take part in the procession, and there was the greatest amount of city pride and feeling about the whole matter. Any scepticism about the existence of Lady Godiva, or the historic truth of her ride, is to Coventry people what an insinuation that William Tell is a myth would be to a Swiss; she is an article of faith with them. This year that I speak of they had engaged a woman from a circus to personate Lady Godiva."

"Accustomed to the costume?" I suggested with mild jocosity; but the old man took it as seriously as possible.

"Quite so," he said, "that, and the riding, and all. She was a handsome woman—that is—perhaps I shouldn't think her so handsome now, but then the whole committee thought her so," and the old rogue's cheeks grew a diffident red.

"Ah, you were on the committee to select the heroine?" said I.

"Yes," he replied judicially, as if he was sorry he had admitted it, but was determined not to recede, "and

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now comes in the curious circumstance. The day after she was engaged she disappeared—disappeared from her lodgings, from the circus company, from Coventry itself. It was impossible to find her, and she attended none of the advertised rehearsals—for the whole affair used to be rehearsed as carefully as a Shakespeare revival, or any other spectacle.

"The weeks passed, the drills went on, and they almost gave her up for lost. I say almost, for there was always the chance that she might come back, which prevented them, from day to day, from engaging another Godiva, until the very day before the procession was to take place. They were at their wits' end, and did not know what to do. As I said, this was a matter to which the mayor and the town authorities gave their attention; they felt that a procession without any Lady Godiva was not only *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out—you've heard that expression, I suppose—but a disgrace to Coventry, and a blow to the dignity of England. In the midst of their distracted deliberation, another young woman from the circus volunteered to take the part of Godiva at this short notice, and calm was restored to the town council.

"The next morning at the appointed hour the procession organised in line, and the impromptu Lady Godiva took her place at the head of the troops, in long red wig and scanty attire. Something of the dilemma the authorities had been in had got rumoured about, and the excitement and the crowd were immense.

"The trumpet sounded for the start. There was a grand flourish, when suddenly a woman's scream brought everything to a standstill.

"There stood Lady Godiva Number One, her long red hair—she didn't have to wear a wig—floating about *her* scanty attire. She stormed up to Lady Godiva Number Two, and, before any one could interfere, had dragged her from her horse, and the two had engaged in a regular pitched battle. They fought and tore each other's faces and hair like two furies. They were both in love with the same man, which added animus to their caresses, as you may fancy When they were separated, though, which do you think carried the day?"

"Whichever fought the best," I suggested.

"Now, that's very well said, but as far as the fighting went there wasn't much choice," said the old man, rubbing his hands and shaking his head in retrospective enjoyment. "But the crowd and the authorities decided in favour of the second Lady Godiva, because, they said, the first had violated her contract by her disappearance immediately after her engagement. It was settled in very short order, the first Lady Godiva had to retire, much enraged, and the second put on her wig and rode away at the head of the procession, highly elated with her success. That was not the end of it, though, oh, no, not by any means. The first Lady Godiva appealed to the laws of her country."

"Indeed," said I.

"Yes, indeed," asseverated the old man, thinking, as usual, that I questioned his veracity. "I couldn't deceive you about the suit, because, don't you see, you could go and consult the records and find all the papers. It's true. She went to law and sued the mayor and the town authorities, for not letting her appear as Lady Godiva, after engaging her. There was nothing at all in her contract about rehearsals, or the disposal of her time between the day of her engagement and the day of the procession. She contracted to ride as Lady Godiva on such a day at such an hour, and she appeared to time. It was a clear case. She won her suit, and the town authorities had to pay a sum."

"To pay a——?" I queried.

"A sum, a sum of money—damages," he insisted querulously. "You can fancy how a layman's mind would work about the ride; she had exasperated them by keeping them in suspense about her appearance, so when she presented herself, and they had it in their power to humiliate her, as they thought, they declined in favour of her rival. They found out their mistake in court," and the old fellow chuckled anew.

"Did it ever come out why she disappeared, or where she was?" I asked.

"Now, the gossip was that a lawyer of the town secreted her until the final hour, foreseeing the course events would take," he replied, looking at me keenly.

"The damages must have been high to tempt the lawyer to take the risk," said I.

"It was a sum—a sum," he repeated. "It didn't do much more than cover the expenses of secreting the girl, but the money was not altogether what the lawyer had in mind. He was ambitious, and he wished to do what has since become more common, I understand—to begin his career with a sensation. He did it—he did it with a vengeance—he had all the sensation he wanted."

A swarm of questions came to my lips, but I had not sufficient confidence to ask them, and the next day I left Coventry. Other incidents drove the old man and his story from my memory, until one day in London both were brought vividly to mind by seeing the old fellow at a railway station, accompanied by a queer old woman as remarkable in her way as he in his.

They took the same train as I, but a different carriage. However, when I saw them get out I had the curiosity to follow them.

The old man saw to the sending of some luggage, and then, giving his arm to his companion, they set out on a brisk walk, threading the extremely new looking streets with the air of people who were familiar with the place. At last they turned in at the gates of a very pretentious villa, which looked immodestly apparent through the thin young trees on the grounds. I stood still, looking after the pair.

"Rum old gentleman, ain't he?" said a voice at my elbow. A rather well-dressed man was the speaker. He might have been the shopkeeper of the suburb.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"This mansion," he replied, with pride, "is the residence of Sir Samuel Boggs, formerly Lord Mayor of London; and the old people, his father and mother, come up from Coventry once a year to make him a visit. They never tell him just when they're coming, and people do say he ain't over anxious to have 'em come, for he's a great swell, and his father's terrible queer, and his mother she's queerer. They say she was a circus rider, and the old gent ran away with her and married her in Paris, while she was under engagement to ride Lady Godiva at the head of the Coventry procession. There was a great row about it, she——"

"Yes," said I, "I heard of the case when I was in Coventry."

ANNIE TOWNSEND.

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THE POWER OF LOVE.

A Story Found Among the Pompeian Papyri.

During the excavations made in the presence of the King of Naples, in 1815, a fresco of singular beauty was discovered, representing a group of nymphs with their eyes turned towards a central figure. Behind the latter a youthful Love, bending gracefully at her ear, appeared to be whispering some mystery.

The sprightly, eager pose of the little whisperer, the delightful drawing of the nymphs, and even the dazzling colours that seventeen centuries had left undimmed, attracted every artist and every connoisseur.

Of course, the Italian imagination hastened to discover an explanation and a history for the incomparable picture. Every day brought forth a new theory, but all lacked the essential character of probability.

The story of the mysterious fresco was not destined to everlasting secrecy, however. In 1836 one of the papyri, now so admirably deciphered by the system of Collini, on being opened, displayed to the astonished view the fresco in miniature at the top of the first part of the manuscript. The rest of the papyrus contained the present story, of which the fresco was undoubtedly an illustration—a story that we give with all the mutilations which the fragile nature of the half-calcined paper makes inevitable. The largest hiatus occurs just at the beginning; it still defies the erudition of all the Italian schools.

* * * * *

"Oh, Callias! I am weary of the world."

"You are mistaken, Sempronius; you are weary of everything except the world."

"I know what I am saying, Callias, and I am in earnest. But how can I make you believe anything—you, a sceptic by profession, an Athenian wit, a moth that flits from flower to flower through all the gardens of human folly—how can you believe in a profound distaste for all the earth contains? You are an epicurean animal."

"No, my melancholy philosopher, I am a true epicurean, tender in friendship and love for the pleasure there is in both. I am only cruel to my poor country-houses, and this hour my deepest perplexity is whether to go to-morrow to my villa on the Tiber, or pass my languid days in my grotto at Sunium, while this voluptuous, pestilential dog-star is in the ascendant."

The star Sirius flung its splendour along the Bay of Naples. The young Roman gazed passionately at the scene, and sighed, rather than said:

"Oh, that my mere wish could shake off the earth and send me soaring to the very empyrean!"

Here the slaves, coming to announce supper, cut short his comp'aint.

"I follow a different plan from you Romans," said the Greek, Callias, as they reclined at the table. As he spoke, he pointed with smiling satisfaction to the paintings that adorned the apartment. "You place your pictures in the strongest light and the most frequented room. I have mine in this place, never lighted except by the setting sun. I treat them like heart friends, only meeting them far from the day's tumult, and supping thus in their companionship."

Despite his soul-sickness, Sempronius looked and admired. His friend's fancy about lighting the paintings came out strangely as regarded one, a masterpiece by Alcamenes of Ionia. It was Olympus, the scene described by Homer where Venus in the assembly of the immortals comes to implore Jupiter to send victory to the Trojan arms. With the prodigality of luxury that sacrifices mounds of riches and treasures of genius to a moment's gratification, but that gratification supreme, the glorious work could be seen and comprehended just as the sun touched the horizon. The two friends prepared for the fleeting but supreme enjoyment as a pyramid of light slowly spread over the painting.

All the upper part was in darkness when the light first fell upon the rugged foot of the mountain. Then it crept up among the vines and olives of the slope. Then the region of the immortals was lapped in a golden air. The jewelled thrones of the different deities flashed. The moving ray seemed to impart life to the figures. In the centre was one last form seemingly veiled by a cloud, which appeared to melt under the glowing kiss of the growing light.

The form was Venus bending suppliant before the father of the gods. Her attitude was that of mingled nobility and meekness, but her face, her indescribable face, was love and nothing but love. Callias gave its charms the vain glance of a collector, but the young Sempronius gave a cry, buried his head in the folds of his robe, and flung himself down before the painting, panting with adoration.

When he rose day was done; the painting was enveloped in darkness, vanished as by enchantment.

* * * * *

"So you mean to wander over the world, chasing the nameless wonder of a dream? My young and ardent friend, take my advice, and leave such peregrinations to the geographers. Return to Rome; tell your excellent uncle that you are quite ready to marry his daughter's fortune; tell him that you are an obedient son, and have no idea of going counter to your worthy father's wishes. Then, having sacrificed to filial duty, and given a wedding that will be the talk of Rome for twenty-four hours, get on your helmet, if you still feel like travelling, and go and fight the Parthians, or eclipse the fame of Alexander—be buried in a mausoleum in India, in which later generations of barbarians will hang the crane above your illustrious bones."

Callias spoke mockingly, but a glance at his friend made him repent his jest.

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"I have confided to you alone the hopeless misery of my soul," cried the excitable Roman. "I have told you that the barbarous resolution of my family to bind me in a matter that, of all the affairs of life calls for the greatest liberty of choice, inspired me with a precocious aversion for the being to whom I was to sacrifice my reason, my heart, and my will. Our insane betrothal in childhood gave us each such an invincible hatred for the other, that we separated at once never to meet again."

"The resolve of two spoilt children," said Callias, this time taking pains to speak seriously. "Why should it control maturer years? Your cousin is no longer a child. She may be as lovely as Hebe and joyous as Flora. Have you never felt any curiosity about her since your terrible nursery divorce?"

"She?" cried Sempronius; "the instrument of my parents' tyranny? None whatever. I was sent to Greece to be educated. My career in the army threw me upon the frontiers of Pannonia. Since then I have lived in Asia Minor. I have never seen Rome; but a word will explain all I have seen," here Sempronius paused; "I have seen the being who will fill the void in my soul for ever. It was at a banquet given to the officers of the legion by the pro-consul Septimius, on our arrival at Ephesus. A sumptuous gala-day ended with a play given in the palace gardens, and acted by those dedicated to the service of the temple.

"The drama was like some of Ovid's, a fable on the power of love. The little god appeared under a hundred different forms—warrior, poet, musician, king, or travelling merchant with stores of jewels and rich stuffs, all to conquer the heart of a beautiful girl. And what a conquest she would have been, the one upon whom the young enchanter practised all his arts.

"I have never seen any one, never imagined anyone so beautiful. There, before me, lived and moved incarnate the Venus of the waves, or Pandora, stooping from Olympus. My fate was sealed for ever. The conviction pierced my soul, vividly as only truth's own shafts. I trembled in every limb, as the great magician of our passions spread every net, showed every lure to entrap this lovely woman. She resisted them all.

"But one stratagem remained. In the last scene of all, the quiet of a luxurious garden, a youth, in the garb of an Ionian shepherd, offered her neither pomp nor worldly glory, but just a heart brimming with love, faith and honour. If she had resisted then, she would have been more or less than mortal. She was neither; she was a woman—true as Nature, touched by the sweet impulse of Nature. I had triumphed in her resistance, now I triumphed in her submission. I saw with joy that her beauty was not the beauty of a statue. My face flushed as the rosy colour stole into hers. A tear fell from her eyes, my own were wet.

"With a sigh and a smile she admitted the power of the heart over the heart, and with silent tears of joy let herself fall upon the breast of the Ionian. Then, in a thunder-clap, the whole scene lifted like a flying cloud, and instead of the simple garden we saw the immortal meads of Idalia. The Ionian shepherd was Love himself, back in his first form; delightful, powerful, sportive, and kingly. The young god, wafted on his purple wings, flew to the arms of the fair mortal, and crowned her with amaranths in the presence of the nymphs, as a symbol of her metamorphosis into an immortal dweller in the grove of Love's Isle."

"And so," said Callias, with cold eyes, his satirical temperament leaving him untouched by emotion, "you have fallen in love with one of the dancers of the temple. The heart's ice melts readily under those good Asiatic skies; I fancy she will take very kindly to a second rehearsal with you in the *rôle* of the Ionian shepherd."

Sempronius's hand flew to his dagger.

"Evil Greek!" he cried; "the stars above us are not farther removed than my idol from the unhallowed breath of suspicion. I never saw her again. All my researches were in vain. Only your hateful mockery could cause you to forget that those priestesses are as sacred as the vestals of the Capitol. She was one of the maidens of the altar."

Callias soothed his friend's indignation.

"Why have you not attempted to find this mirror of perfection?" he asked. "Have you never offered to marry her?"

"Find her!" cried the Roman; "this is the second year I have spent in searching through Asia, Greece, and Italy, impelled by unconquerable hope. She has left the temple. I could almost believe that she has floated up to heaven. But if I found her, what could I do? My father, on his deathbed, left me the choice of his blessing or his curse, according as I did or did not marry my cousin, Euphrosyne. Wealth I can disdain, and tyranny despise; but I cannot trample on the dying commands of a father. His voice from the tomb summons me to obey."

"Then forget this other girl," said his amiable adviser.

The Roman slowly lifted his large black eyes filled with scorn.

"Forget her!" he cried, "I have no more power to forget her than to lose consciousness that I am alive. Everything compels me to remember her—music, light, stars, soft evening sounds, roses, the clouds, all that touches my heart means her and her only. You saw my agitation that evening at your villa. The Venus of that Olympus was the living idol of my thoughts. I would have given all I possess to have that picture and die. But even as I gazed the spirit of my father seemed to speak from the gathering gloom, and I fell forward in terror and dismay."

At that moment a slave entered to announce that a trireme from Rome had touched at Piræus, and had brought letters for both friends.

Callias retired to read his precious documents from the queen of cities, Sempronius fell into a reverie, fanned by the airs of a Grecian twilight.

While he gave the reins to his exalted imagination, Callias, having read his letters, returned with an air of mingled pleasure and pain.

"You are free," he said abruptly; "read this letter from your relative, Catullus. He says that your cousin, Euphrosyne, is dead. In the delirium of a malarial fever she flung herself into the Tiber. Her body was found a week before this letter started. Catullus describes the funeral ceremony most minutely, and is evidently very proud of having been invited to it."

* * * * *

"And now," said Callias, "for Ephesus."

* * * * *

The night was gloriously beautiful; the trireme floated from the harbour, leaving a long furrow of light behind.

The two friends stood on the deck watching the shore-lights wane and the moon rise. The Parthenon stood out pale, solemn, and solitary against the sky. When a little temple on Sunium's marbled steep came in sight the sailors lighted up the shrine of Pallas Athene on the deck, and began their evening hymn to the tutelary

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goddess of Attica. This reminded Callias of supper, and he went below to order a repast worthy an imperial trireme, while Sempronius, wrapped in his military mantle, watched the flashing topaz constellation of Taurus overhead.

As the echoes of the hymn died away, a slender, rosy flame rose from the promontory, trembled a moment above the temple, and wavered up to heaven. The sailors fell upon their faces, and received the signal as the favourable response of the goddess. All felt that it was an auspicious augury for their voyage to Asiatic shores.

* * * * *

The priest of Diana resisted all the eloquence of the two friends who insisted upon seeing the priestess of the sanctuary. Callias offered him a purse filled with Thracian gold. The hierophant had no sooner touched it than he flung it upon the ground as if stung by an asp, turned and fled. Sempronius, dismayed at seeing his last hope leaving him, ran after the priest and clutched at his robe. The hand that had been laid upon the incorruptible minister of Diana was adorned with a magnificent emerald. His eyes fastened upon it, he turned. The gem mysteriously glided upon his finger. Without a word he drew a key from beneath his purple robe and opening a low door, almost invisible in the massive carvings, noiselessly ushered the two friends into the depths of the temple.

The temple of Diana of Ephesus was the most celebrated place of devotion in the world. Callias was thrilled to find himself within its famous walls, from which kings were barred and which contained more treasures than many empires. The day's worship was done. The colossal bronze doors were closed upon the populace. All was night, silence and solitude.

The Roman, wrapped in his own thoughts, heard only the harps and flutes whose accords swelled from the distant halls.

The priest now turned into a deeper and more secret passage. Sempronius followed, but Callias drew him back. The pale light of a lamp showed that he had half drawn his sword, with an unmistakable expression. The Greek was evidently familiar with Asiatic faith. The place might be a mere pit where strangers were killed and robbed; Sempronius smiled as if the present and future were alike indifferent to him, and plunged into the darkness. The Greek paused, then wholly drawing his sword, slowly followed his ardent companion. The passage was long and tortuous: at last it ended in a descent, and the light wholly failed. They reached a small door. The priest's voice was heard whispering:

"You must wait here till I come."

With these words he disappeared.

"Now," said Callias, "we have only what we deserve, and we can give the world the warning of our stupendous folly; for that priest will think we have had quite enough glory already, without the addition of relating the marvels of our escape. What a shame that we didn't follow my impulse and make daylight shine through the fellow before he led us here to die like dogs."

Sempronius vowed the priest was honest. An hour passed, then another, and he did not return. Callias endeavoured to find his way back, but after a few random steps he found the passage obstructed by huge blocks of stone.

"The treachery is patent," he cried. "These are catacombs, and we shall join the other phantoms, and walk here for ever. Exquisite imbecility! Not to know that the priest would no more dare to betray the secrets of his temple than face a naked sword! But he certainly got out of the difficulty in the most superior manner. At present our occupation is reduced to wandering around here till we fall into some pit, or quietly doubling up on some of these stones to die of hunger!"

His friend's mind was naturally more elevated, purer, and already mounted higher.

"Callias," he said, "your injurious philosophy makes you distrust everything, even yourself. As for me, I have not so much that is attractive to me in the world, as to be reduced to despair by this trap. Of course, the priest is a rogue. I might have known that a man that sells himself for a ring would not hesitate to betray his corrupters. He has left us here to die, but death is a brave man's last resource. Stand up, and at least let us not yield our lives without a struggle."

The Greek had a noble soul. The cant of the man of the world fell from him. He grasped his friend's hand with genuine feeling. "Forward!" he cried. Sempronius went first; but the way was beset with momentarily increasing obstacles. At last it was impossible to take another step.

"Now," cried the Greek, in a tone of mingled irony and despair, "the experiment is complete. What is the use of breaking our bones in climbing over rocks that only take us nearer to the bowels of the earth? Come, take and hold this sword, and do me the last service of a Roman can for his best friend."

Sempronius took the sword in silence and broke it under his heel. The blade striking the stones made a few sparks, and by their fleeting light they perceived that they were in the midst of a huge crypt, whence branched several corridors in different directions. They entered upon the one which seemed to lead the farthest and end in the outer air.

"I am not a patient man, my friend," said Callias. "I will follow you once more, but if this only leads to more tombs I insist upon being allowed to rest from my labours in my own fashion."

"I only ask for another instant," cried the Roman firmly. "Afterwards you may be my guide to the everlasting sleep where the wretched forget and are forgotten."

As he finished speaking, a faint cry, followed by hurried footsteps, fell upon their ears. They paused. A ray of light trembled in the far recesses of the labyrinth, and both rushed towards it. The light struggled through the cracks of a narrow door. Sempronius looked, gave a cry, and rushed into the hall. A woman stood with pinioned arms before a lighted altar, whereon lay a knife. The priest who had betrayed the two friends, regarded the human victim with the fixed eye of cruelty.

A group of spectres with melancholy gaze and long murky garments, looked on at the deed of blood. When Sempronius appeared, the woman raised her eyes and rushed towards him. The priest seized the knife and endeavoured to plunge it into her breast, but the terrible blow was destined never to fall. Callias still held the fragment of his sword, and plunged it to the hilt in the body of the murderer. He fell with a groan, and expired at their feet. All the spectres drew swords. In a flash all was conflict, uproar, carnage.

* * * * *

The trireme entered the Piræus, and Callias wished his friend to remain in Greece, but Sempronius, wounded in body, and broken-hearted, begged to be taken to Italy to die, and be buried with his ancestors. Callias forgot

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all his philosophy as he stood by the noble youth's bedside and heard him rave in the delirium of passion and despair.

"The victim stands by my couch each night," said the Roman, "addressing those monsters with compassionate words. I knew her at once in the labyrinth, changed and dishevelled as she was. She was the first, she will be the last love of my life. Tell me all you know about her; tell me once more, and yet again, that I may die hearing of her."

Callias would then spend an hour repeating that the fair priestess had chanced to see him at the pro-consul's banquet; had loved him with involuntary passion unknown to herself and to him; but finally her secret escaped her, and she was marked for the vengeance of the goddess as a recreant priestess. Her simple wish to leave the temple was an unpardonable crime. The vengeance of the divinity was considered incomplete unless the object of her love was also sacrificed; which explained the priest's willingness to introduce them to the shrine; he had trapped them to make them expiatory victims, and was reserving them for the sacred knife. After the combat in the sacrificial hall, they had been captured, thrown into a dungeon, delivered without knowing how, and seeking refuge in the palace of the pro-consul, the latter had hurried them out of Asia. The priestess had probably perished.

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Sempronius lay on a couch of ivory set with pearls; his curtains were of Persian silk; the silver statue of a nymph poured a slender stream of perfumed water from a crystal urn into a Parian basin; the floor of the room was strewn with roses. But the delicate profusion of patrician luxury was lost upon him. His thoughts were in Ephesus, in the cavern where he had seen that exquisite form of beauty trembling before the destruction of a fanatic's knife.

Callias abruptly entered, and asked in his usual tone, how the invalid was doing under the care of the new physician who had come to save him from his obstinacy and firm intention of dying.

Sempronius smiled sadly, and taking his friend's hand, said, in a voice full of feeling:

"Callias, I think I am as free as any one from superstition, but there is something more than human in this strange leech. Outlandish as his accent and Ethiopian countenance are, he has the gift of reading human nature with a resistless skill. He knows my thoughts, and is master of the secrets of nature. I almost tremble in his presence at the thought that I am in the hands of a being superior to my mortal faculties."

"Oh, he dabbles in magic, does he?" said Callias with disdain.

"I have no secrets from you, Callias," said Sempronius. "I have implored him to show me the vision of Ephesus once more before I die."

* * * * *

Sempronius entered the hall first. All was dark; but Callias carried a little lamp under a fold of his robe, and murmured:

"This is rather like our old adventure in the labyrinth; but I confess I have some curiosity to see how your Ethiopian who is such a master of magic, will manage his spirits."

As he spoke, a pale blue flame rose and settled in the centre of the ceiling. They then saw that they were in a vast circular hall. Sounds of instruments were softly audible near them, and seemed to issue from the ground beneath their feet. A vapour rose suddenly before their eyes, floating from right to left, over the walls of the apartment, and finally rested above their heads.

A voice that seemed to come from the depths of the cloud, asked them what they most wished to see.

Sempronius, trembling, pronounced the words: "The priestess of Ephesus."

Luscious music rolled through the air. One wall of the chamber seemed to disappear, and open on the sea at sunset.

"The Piræus!" cried Callias, and pointed to the trireme outward bound.

The scene changed to Ionia and the burning skies of Asia. Two manly figures, a Greek and an Italian, appeared under the cypresses that ring the temple of Diana. A third figure joined them, led them away, and all were lost in darkness.

A line of light now crept along the ground, and the two spectators recognised the vaults where they had been deserted by the priest; soon a distant hall appeared, the victim, the priest, and the circle of attendants.

Sempronius gave a cry as the beautiful victim knelt for mercy. He tried to spring towards her, but was held back by his friend, and fell fainting in his arms.

When he opened his eyes the scene was changed; a green and flowery garden spread the luxuriance of Oriental vegetation before his eyes. The landscape was animated by living figures; a group of nymphs were dancing to the sound of instruments they held in their hands, and when the circle parted, a throne of moss and flowers were seen. On the throne sat a young queen in rustic garb, her eyes bent upon the ground, while a young Love whispered his enchantments in her ear; the scene at the pro-consul's banquet appeared a second time before the astonished eyes of Sempronius.

His impulse was irresistible; he sprang towards the vision; but this time it was not a sprite of air. A woman, a real woman, sighing, blushing, beautiful, fell into his arms, agitated and tearful! The prietess, the magician, and Euphrosyne were the same person!

* * * * *

"Gaze on my happiness, incredulous one!" said Sempronius, with an adoring look at his wife, who held their fair child in her arms.

"The event seems to argue that there is such a thing," said the Greek, "but I will say this: Find me a girl, cousin, whom I shall first hate without knowing; who shall love me with a romantic affection, as Euphrosyne loved you, without even knowing whether you were worth a sigh; who shall flee from her country and pass as dead in order to give me complete liberty to play the fool to my heart's content; who shall become a priestess, and after saving me from the claws of a villainous confederacy of murderous monks, shall open the doors of my prison, follow me across the sea, sacrifice for me her woman's vanity sufficiently to masquerade as a negress and a witch, in order to save me; who shall be a thousand times a greater witch by the power of her eyes, who shall throw herself into my arms, and then——"

"Then," said Sempronius, his eyes sparkling with joy, "then, like me, you will marry the idol of your heart."

"Yes, yes, charming, I'm sure," said Callias, setting his mouth with a comically grave air, "but as she was your betrothed in the first place, why, in the name of Love and Venus, put yourself to so much trouble?"

Peter Parr.

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MARTHA.

"Sit down, ma'am," said the hotel-keeper's mother, placing a chair. "The 'bus will be here in a minute, and a couple is going to start from my house—a young married couple. You'll be surprised when you sees 'em, for as far as looks go—well, he's as handsome as he can be and she is as plain as a stone fence. He's educated—college graduate. She has a plain, country school education, that is all; but she's good. Yes, she is good. And now that she is so happy she has a sort of different expression.

"She was born here, Martha Hill was, and she got a sewing-machine when she was twelve years old. My husband kept his hotel then. He was a kind man, and he thought a good deal of Martha. So, seeing the girl so clever we had her come and live with us.

"So she came and had a little room that was handy to the dining-room. Martha was the most industrious young girl I ever saw. Plain girls somehow are apt to do more than pretty ones. Perhaps they don't look in the glass so much.

"Well, Martha grew up, and, as far as I know, she never had a sweetheart. Girls not half so good as she was got married, and she made their dresses, but Martha stayed single.

"She was neat and trim, and you'd have thought someone would have seen what a good wife she'd make; but the men think more of a pretty face than anything else. And I had made up my mind Martha would never marry, when in the middle of summer Mr. Willard, a young widower, brought his little boy here to board. He came out himself every Saturday, and stayed over a Sunday.

"Martha took to the little boy from the first. He was always with her, and I never knew how fond she was of children before, and I never heard her talk so much to anyone as she talked to Mr. Willard, mostly about the boy.

"Poor Martha! I used to think; if you were pretty he might take a fancy to you, but he's not the man to marry a plain woman, even if he would give up style and fashion.

"But I saw that Martha had a heart in her bosom, like other women, and mine ached for her. And so it went on for two or three years. Every June the little boy was brought down, and he wrote to Martha in the winter, and she was so pleased to get the letters.

"This summer he came as usual and stayed longer. The autumn was well over before his father spoke of taking him away, and old Mrs. Rapps, who finds out everything somehow, told us the child was likely to have a step-mother.

"Mr. Willard was paying attention to a pretty young heiress, and she seemed to fancy him.

"Martha heard the talk. Next morning her eyes were red. She said she sewed too late. I knew she'd been crying, but I said nothing. What good does it ever do to talk?

"Well, Martha was going to make Miss Potter's wedding-dress that day—to finish—and she said she might be late. But it wasn't far to the Potters, and their Jim would see her home, so she went off.

That night a stupid girl I had put the boy—Kenyon his name was—to bed, and it seems he asked for a candle, and she left one lighted.

"I suppose the wind blew the curtains into the flames; but, at all events, while Isaac was in the stable feeding the horses, he saw a queer light and looked up. The house was on fire.

"You know what a fright fire puts people into. We lost our heads entirely. I remembered the child first, but when I got upstairs the hall was in flames, and I, in a muslin dress, could do nothing. I ran down, calling for a ladder. We had lent all ours to a neighbour who was painting. And while one ran one way and one another, we heard a scream, and saw Martha Hill come running up the road.

"'The child!' she cried.

"'There!' I said. 'And the stairs are on fire, and the ladder's gone.'

"She screamed no more. In a minute she had her gown off and stood in her woollen skirt, and then up she went, up the big wisteria vine that my father had planted fifteen years before to shade the porch, and that had grown big and strong, with branches like a tree, in that time.

"The zinc wire was firm, and the vine held. Martha was a light weight. Up she went. Up! up! up! We heard the little engine coming from the village, and the neighbours shouting; but she was in at the window before they came in sight.

"'She's gone to her death,' said I, but the next instant she was out again.

"The child was on her back, its arms about her neck, its head covered with a woollen shawl, and as she went up so Martha came down again.

"We took her in our arms. The child was not hurt. The woollen wrap was scorched, that was all. But Martha's hair was singed, her woollen skirts in tinder, and her hands lacerated by the wires and splintered branches.

"'I've saved him,' she said, 'and I am willing to die.'

"And then she fainted.

"I put her into bed, and the doctor looked at her. He thought she would be very ill, but, somehow, she was not. Her burns were slight, and when they cut her hair, it curled up about her face, and looked prettier than the smooth bands she used to wear; and I sat down and wrote to Mr. Willard, telling him the story. He came down at once.

"She was sitting in the easy-chair in the parlour when he came, and he went in, holding little Kenyon by the hand. I did not follow. I sat here and went on knitting.

"I don't know what they said, but in about an hour Mr. Willard came out. He led the child straight up to me.

"'Tell Mrs. Ashton, Kenyon,' he said, and the little fellow threw his arms about my neck.

"'Martha is going to be my mamma,' he said.

"I looked at Mr. Willard, and he held out his hand.

"'I will try to make her happy,' he said.

"They were married yesterday, and they are going away to-day. Here comes the 'bus."

The 'bus came. I sat opposite the young couple for many miles.

Such a happy face as Martha's could not look plain, and I am sure her husband loves her.

B. S. K.

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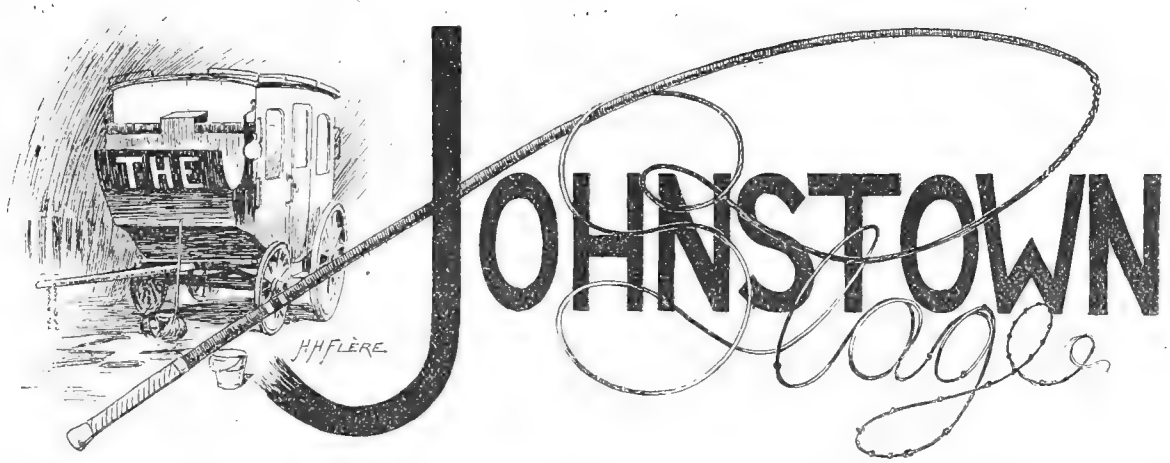

The Johnstown stage was due at City of Rocks at five o'clock. About that hour a man in a flannel shirt, dirty soldier-trousers tucked in his boots, and a slouch hat on the back of his bronzed, bearded, unkempt head, materialised in the obscurity of the doorway of the station-house, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked down the road. As he stood there, a cloud of dust became visible in the distance. It floated and wavered nearer and nearer, until the creaking and jingling of dry wood, leather, and metal, and the pounding of hoofs, were heard.

Then, as the cloud approached the station, an apparition of two horses and a stage-coach was seen within it. The cloud stopped in front of the house, the dust settled, and the coach, coated inside and out with the white powder, was disclosed. The driver, looking like a miller, laid his whip on the roof and prepared to descend. The station-keeper, who, meanwhile had stepped out into the road and silently commenced to unhook the traces, looked up for the first time.

The next moment he dropped the trace with an exclamation of wonder, while his hand slowly but instinctively sought the revolver which hung in a belt loosely about his hips. For a few seconds he scrutinised the face of the man who was swinging himself down from the box, and then his look of surprise changed to one of recognition, his hand relaxed its hold on the pistol, and he said heartily: "Well, I'll be durned! Lieutenant is that you? Why, what's come of Jim?"

"He was taken sick down by Shot-gun Creek, and had to lay off at the milk-ranch," said the man addressed, taking off his hat and beating out the dust against his leg. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but slender, and was dressed in the same manner as the station-keeper, even to the revolver which hung about his hips. His voice and bearing, however, the only characteristics unaffected by the dust, betrayed a difference between them.

"Sick, nothing!" exclaimed the ostler, in a tone of disgust, taking out the straw which he held between his teeth, and throwing it energetically on the ground. "That fellow's al'ays sick! I'm durned ef I don't believe he's weakened sence Whistling Dick jumped his stage last month! He's yeard that the paymaster's sending his money up by express this trip, to pay off the boys at the fort, and he's afeard he'll git jumped agin, durn him! That's w'at's the matter. It leaves me in a purty fix!" he continued. "Frank's out after stock, and there's no one yere but me. Who's goin' to take the stage on?"

"I'll take it on as far as Pack City, if you like," said the lieutenant. "The old man will find someone there to take Jim's place easy enough."

The station-keeper, without replying, mechanically resumed his duties of taking out the horses, and watched them meditatively as they walked off to the stables. Then, finally turning to the lieutenant, with the air of one whose mind is made up, he said: "By thunder, I guess that's the only thing we *kin* do. I can't leave yere. I wouldn't have a head of stock left by the time I got back. Them Injuns is gittin' worse and worse, not to mention the hoss-thieves and road-agents that's gittin' thicker'n fleas on a dog's back. It's sort o' crowdin' you, though, lieutenant, and I don't know what the old man'll say."

"He won't say thank you, at any rate," said the lieutenant.

"You kin gamble on that," said the ostler approvingly. "Who's this Johnny-come-lately?" he added, as a passenger from the inside of the coach strolled towards them.

"Jim said he was a stock-man," said the lieutenant "he's billed for Pack City."

"Jim!" growled the ostler contemptuously. "Jim's a stranger himself in these parts. How should he know?"

And when the traveller, an elderly man, joined them with a sociable remark that "it was purty tol'able warm," the ostler vented his scorn for Jim by ignoring him altogether and continuing his talk with the lieutenant about way-bills, express, mail, and other stage matters. But the passenger appearing in nowise affected by this lack of cordiality held his ground, and if he did not join in the conversation, listened to it so persistently that the ostler finally turned to him, and said rather sarcastically: "Stranger, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Well, no, pard," replied the traveller good-humouredly, "there's nothin' you kin do fer me, but I reckon you kin do somethin' fer thet lady inside, she's petered plumb out, and the kid's yelling like all possessed."

At this the amateur driver walked over to the stage-door and looked in. There was the usual litter of mail-bags, and small bundles, and smell of dust and leather.

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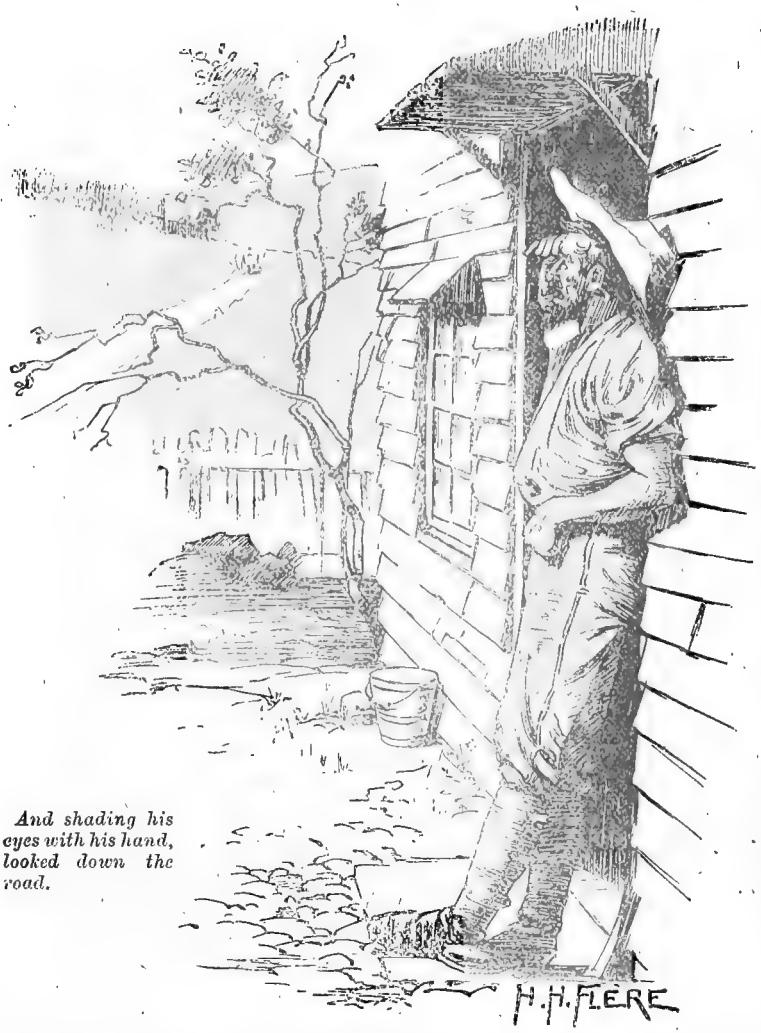

And shading his eyes with his hand, looked down the road.

Addressing the woman, who, in a long linen cloak, and with a veil over her face, reclined limply in one corner, half holding a crying baby, the lieutenant said: "Supper station, madam."

This announcement producing no reply, he repeated it in a louder tone. The only result was an added force to the baby's cries.

"I reckon she's fainted," said the other passenger, appearing at his elbow with a cup of water, "try this yere."

The lieutenant got inside, followed by the old man, to whom he unceremoniously handed the baby. Taking out his pocket-flask he mixed a little whisky and water, and pushing the veil up from the unconscious mouth, he succeeded in partially reviving the exhausted woman. "Now then," he said, in an authoritative tone, "you must come outside in the open air, and wash your face and hands; that will brace you up quicker than anything. Then when you have had some dinner you will be all right. We haven't much time," he added.

The woman obediently arose, but, cramped and worn out by the long day's ride, had to be assisted to the ground. She succeeded in walking over to the water-trough, and sitting down on its edge, silently took her baby. The lieutenant brought her a basin and towel and left her to her toilet. Presently he returned and, said: "Supper is ready."

"Thank you, I don't want any supper," was the reply.

As he heard her speak for the first time, the lieutenant looked at the shrouded form with surprise. The voice was low and trained, the voice of a gentlewoman. It startled him with a swift suggestion of perfumed lace and six-button kid gloves, of waltz music, yachting, and low murmured words in dim conservatories. The recollection of the fried pork and beans awaiting them in the station, however, brought his mind back to the subject.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but you must eat something. You can't stage all day without eating."

Her back was turned towards him as she sat dabbling her hand in the water for the amusement of the baby, and he went round and stood in front of her to emphasise his remark. Her veil was still down, and she did not raise her head as she replied, in the even tones of a superior addressing an over-zealous inferior: "You are very kind, but I don't want anything."

The lieutenant was rather nettled at this, but, nevertheless, persisted. His interest was awakened. Besides, it would be very inconvenient to have her faint on the road. "I hope you won't think me obtrusive," he said, modulating his tone respectfully, "but you must have something. If you would prefer it, I will bring it out here."

Then she looked up half-resentfully, half-curiously, evidently thinking that this was a very odd stage-driver. At last she said: "You are giving yourself needless trouble, but as you insist upon it, I will take a cup of tea and a little milk for baby."

If her purpose was to rid herself of his importunities, her request was very effective. Tea! Milk! The lieutenant returned to the station-house thoughtfully pulling his moustache.

"Now," he said to himself, "that is like a woman! Why couldn't she ask for oysters and champagne or something reasonable—but *tea! milk!*"

"Nate," he said doubtfully to the ostler, "you don't happen to have such a thing as—as *tea* about the house, do you?"

"Why not?" replied the station-keeper promptly.

"Oh, I don't mean any sage-brush wash," rejoined the lieutenant impatiently, "I'm talking about shop tea."

"Well that's what I'm talking about," said Nate; "a Chinaman gave some to Frank the other day."

"Nate," said the lieutenant, drawing out his flask, "take a drink!"

And in a few minutes he was carrying out a cup of tea and some biscuits, unconscious of the elaborate wink with which Nate, restored somewhat to good humour by the unexpected drink, favoured the elderly passenger.

The lieutenant found the object of his solicitude as

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he had left her, enduring the discomfort of her condition with silent patience.

"You are very good," she said more gently, but in the same even tone of a superior. Evidently this woman was accustomed to being waited on.

"I suppose that condensed milk will do for the baby?" said the lieutenant. "Have you anything to put it in?"

Yes, certainly, the baby had a bottle. But, alas! a search for the bottle revealed the fact that it must have been jolted out of the stage while the mother was unconscious.

"What shall I do!" she exclaimed, her fortitude suddenly forsaking her. "He won't drink out of a cup, and I am afraid he is hungry now." Evidently tears were gathering behind the veil, tears that she never would have shed for herself.

"Oh, I can fix that easy enough," said the stage-driver consolingly.

Quickly entering the house once more, for time was getting precious, and the beans were getting cold, he seized an empty beer-bottle, washed it out, filled it with a hot mixture of condensed milk, drove the cork in tight, pared the cork down to a convenient size, and pierced it with a saddler's awl; then, tearing a piece of linen from his handkerchief, he padded the cork and tied it securely.

"There," he said to the disconsolate mother, "I think that will work. I once raised a litter of puppies on no better one."

The lady, who had smiled rather hopelessly at this cumbrous device, anxiously watched the infant's attempts to manage it. The lieutenant, notwithstanding that the beans were getting cold, looked on with almost as much interest. An expression of contentment gradually stole over the baby's face. Evidently the bottle met with its entire approval. Then the mother gave the child a quick, delighted hug, and with a little, low laugh of relief, turned her veiled face to the driver and said, but this time her voice trembled: "You are so kind! How can I thank you!"

But he only replied with an amused smile, and instinctively, though carelessly, lifting his hat, he went back to his supper of cold pork and beans, while the eyes behind the veil followed him with a look of increasing surprise and curiosity.

The stage, when it left City of Rocks, was twenty minutes late. But the jack-rabbits, which laid back their ears and scudded at its approach, found it no mean rival that afternoon.

"I'll bet ten dollars he makes it up afore he gets to Stoney Creek, and not turn a hair!" said the station-keeper to himself. Then, after a further contemplation of the fast receding cloud of dust, he added in a more reckless tone: "I'll bet ten dollars he makes it up afore he gets to Dick Day's ranche, and not turn a hair!" As no one accepted either of these generous propositions, he shook his head and remarked confidentially: "There ain't many kin copper the lieutenant, now, if you year me!" and, disappearing in the gloom of the interior of the house, City of Rocks was left once more to the hot silence of its fantastic stones.

* * * * *

The sun was setting behind Bald Butte as the Johnstown stage approached the five-mile grade which led down to Stoney Creek. The air was growing cool. The rabbits, looking like sage-bushes in motion, flitted about in the twilight. A colony of prairie owls, posing themselves at intervals along the road, accompanied the intruding vehicle through their territory, the head of the line rising as the stage drew near, and gravely flying down to the station at the foot until, the danger departed, they solemnly withdrew.

Down the grade the stage went, with the driver on the brake and the horses trotting loosely in their harness, until, with a final jolt and lurch, they fetched up on the bank of Stoney Creek. The driver swung himself off the box, and taking an iron pail out of the boot, proceeded to water his horses. The elderly passenger emerged from the stage with a tin cup, and scooping up some of the bright, cold water from the noisy mountain stream, gallantly took it to the lady inside. Then, helping himself, he said to the driver, with a laugh:

"I jedge you've been making up time. Ye herded 'em along pretty lively down that grade."

The lieutenant nodded his head. The position in which he found himself had responsibilities that discouraged sociability. Going to the other side of the stage he got out his overcoat and put it on. It was a garment made of rough, blue cloth, long and voluminous, with a cape that came to the waist. Quietly slipping his revolver from its holster, he put it in a narrow pocket in the lining of the coat. This pocket, apparently made for the purpose, dispensed with the ostentatious and cumbrous method of belting the pistol on outside. These preparations for the night completed, he mounted to his place, and made the usual, warning inquiry: "All set?"

"If you don't mind, pard," said the passenger, "I'll ride outside for a ways, and give the lady a chance to stretch."

Evidently the bottle met with its entire approval.

"I don't mind," said the lieutenant, and the elderly

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stranger climbed laboriously to his side. The horses' hoofs splashed and the stage wheels crunched their way through the stream, while the water fretted and foamed noisily about the wet fetlocks and through the cleaned spokes. Then hoofs and wheels came out on the soft bank, and the stage sped silently along the damp bottom land. Dark forms shaped themselves into cottonwood trees and alder bushes, and dissolved again into the darkness, while the fresh odour of the earth and growing things scented the night air.

"Have a drink?" said the passenger sociably, drawing out a bottle.

"No, thank you," said the lieutenant, "I don't drink on the box."

"Right you are!" said his companion; "well, here's luck! You h'aint ben long on the line, I take it?"

"No," said the lieutenant.

"I was up in this section a couple o' years ago," continued the passenger, "and I kinder thought I didn't rec'lect your face. It's a fine country up yere, but it ain't as fine a country as some I've seen. Was you ever up round Sin-e-ah-qua-teen?"

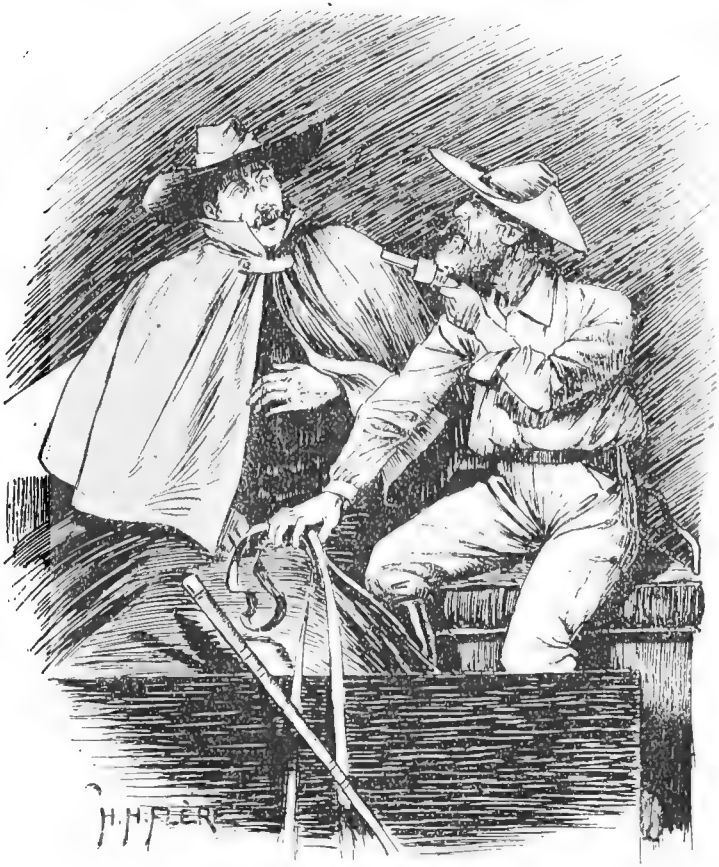
No, the lieutenant had never been to Sin-e-ah-qua-teen.

"You don't happen to be married, do you?"

"No," said the lieutenant, beginning to be amused and entertained by his companion, "I am not married."

The stage had commenced to ascend the grade on the other side of Stoney Creek. The road wound up through a cañon, or gulch, in the bottom of which was the dry bed of a winter torrent. It was a long, tedious pull to the top of the mesa, and the horses had to take their time to do it. Notwithstanding that a thin line of light on the brow of a distant mountain signalled that the moon had risen, it was very dark in the cañon; so dark that although the lieutenant kept peering ahead of the horses, he could see but little more than a bend of the winding road faintly defined by the denser obscurity on each side of it. The passenger himself, notwithstanding his steady flow of talk, seemed affected by the surrounding gloom, and maintained an alert gaze on the side of the road.

"You see," he continued, "I had a wife myself once, so I know something about women. I picked her up in 'Frisco, and jest about six months after I lost 35,000 dollars in the Frazer River excitement. Then I came up yere, and laid out a ranch on Mud River. But my wife, she got sick, and I spent all the money I had left in taking her down again, and in doctoring. Well, sir, when she died, and I came back yere with the little fellows, I found my ranch gone plumb. Six inches of snow on the ground, and the little fellows barefoot, and not a dollar in my pocket, and nothing to eat. I was blue. I tell you, pard, if ever a man were blue I was that man! I jest tuk off my hat and throwed it on the ground, and looked all around. But I didn't throw up no sponge. I tuk to splitting rails, and inside of a month I sold 'em to the guv'ment at the Sahatlin Agency, and cleaned up a hundred dollars. I'm doin' tol'able well now, the country round my way's gittin' settled up. I got my eye on some of these yere immigrants, and I'll pick another wife some day, a young 'un about sixteen, that I kin larn. I'm purty good on the physiog. I don't want no widows, they're larnt all ready to yer hand, but they know too much."



"Hold up your hands, ieutenant.'

The lieutenant laughed, and spoke to his horses, which were showing a restive disinclination to proceed. They were almost at the top of the grade now. A clump of scrub-oaks at the head of the cañon was in sight. The shadows here were very dense by contrast with the moonlight, which lay in the open beyond. It was at these shadows that the horses were pricking their ears. The lieutenant cracked his whip over the unruly animals, but as he did so, he looked sharply in the direction of the oaks. Was not something moving there? Or was it the moonlight shadows playing their usual tricks on highly strung nerves?

Then he remembered that there was a spring under those oaks, and that cattle were always round it; or, perhaps a stray deer from the mountains might have come there to drink. His military training and frontier experience made him guard against unreasoning alarm.

At the same time, the station-keeper's open secret that the paymaster's funds were aboard, flashed across his mind. It would never do for him, an army officer, to hand down Wells-Fargo's box to the first road-agent who asked for it. Professional pride, if naught else, forbade it. He said nothing to the man at his side, but under cover of his cape he slipped the reins and whip into his left hand, and with his right cocked the

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revolver in his pocket. The elderly passenger, notwithstanding that his eyes were also fastened on the clump of oaks, seemed quite unsuspicious, and continued to talk.

"I reckon I can get another wife easy enough. I know a fellow that came in to that section only a little while ago, without a dollar, and he married a right purty girl, only sixteen, and he's older than——"

A shrill whistle suddenly startled the silence of the night. The passenger on the box, almost without a pause, leant over, and laying one hand on the reins with the other pointed a pistol at the driver's head, and said, but no longer in the accents of an uneducated person:

"Hold up your hands, lieutenant!" At the same instant a man with a masked face and holding a gun appeared in the middle of the road and stopped the horses.

They galloped out over the prairie.

The lieutenant turned pale and stared in amazement at the man by his side.

"It's no use," said the elderly passenger sternly. "We've got the drop on you! Be quick, or I'll——"

"Well," said the lieutenant defeatedly, "you have got the drop on me, for a fact!" And, drawing a long breath, he slowly raised his arms. But when his left elbow was as high as his shoulder, with his right hand he pressed the trigger of the revolver in his pocket.

There was a muffled report, a shriek, followed by another report, then another, and another, confused and intermingled, the sharp crack of the rifle ringing out over the duller noise of the pistols. When the sounds ceased the man in the road was crawling on his hands and knees towards the shadow of the oaks whence he had emerged. There was no one on the box but the lieutenant, and he was standing erect. The next moment he pitched head first over the dash-board on to the off-horse's back, and from there rolled on to the road. It needed but this to goad the frightened animals into a stampede, and with the reins under their heels, kicking and shying, they galloped out over the prairie.

It is not easy for two horses to run away with a Concord coach, especially after coming up Stoney Creek grade. And so, after the stage had lumbered and lurched at their heels for a half-mile or so, the horses came down to a trot, and then to a walk, and finally stood still, and gazed around, trembling, and ready for a second flight. The moment that the vehicle stopped, the veiled face of the lady passenger appeared at the door, and her terror-stricken voice cried, but almost inaudibly: "My God! what has happened?"

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Aroused from a troubled sleep by the report of a pistol, followed by a man's shriek, more shots and groans, she had opened her eyes just in time to see a heavy body fall over the wheel and on to the ground.

Then the stage had started forward, the wheel going over the thing on the ground with a sickening jolt. As the stage bounded on she had been thrown violently to and fro, clinging convulsively to her baby, unable to realise what this grisly horror of the night might be. With shaking hands, she now unfastened the door, and stepping out, found herself alone in the awful silence and solitude of the night.

Hark! what was that? She tore her veil from her head, and with it came her hat. Great masses of black hair fell down her shoulders, and a white, young face shone out in the moonlight lovely even in its terror. The noise was but the piping of an insect, but it sounded like a distant shriek. Then the wind stirred the dry buffalo grass, and it seemed to the panic-stricken woman as though it was the voices of men pursuing. Her hair arose, and all the blood in her body rallied in her heart. She would have fainted had it not been for the wailing of the dependent baby in her arms. What should she do? Her first impulse was to run from what might be behind her. But her feeble limbs failed at the sight of the wide plains and obstructing sage-brush. If she could but get upon the stage and drive.

She went to the horses and spoke to them. One of them whinnied in reply, and that encouraged her. She crept between them, talking to them all the time in trembling, beseeching tones, and got the reins out from beneath their hoofs. Then holding the reins and the baby in one arm, she scrambled on to the wheel, and from there to the driver's seat. Everything was so big, the reins, the seat, the break, her little feet did not reach the dash-board, but rested on some sacks of barley that filled the forward boot. In this barley she made a nest for the baby. When she was ready to start, it was evident that she was not ignorant of driving. She held the reins and whip like the amateur drivers of the coaching clubs. The horses had been restive during these preparations, and started off freely at her word.

And now the distraction of driving and the sense of motion diminished her first ghastly horror, and replaced it with nervous excitement. She had no difficulty in finding the road, the horses took her back to it. When she reached it, however, she stopped to look round, and determine which way led to Pack City. It would be frightful to make a mistake, and drive back into that awful tragedy. She thought, with a shudder, of what might be there, dead or living, in the moonlit road or in the blackness of the bushes. She wondered what had become of the driver. Was it his body that she had seen fall from the stage? He must be either dead or wounded; perhaps he was only wounded. She would send back help instantly from Pack City.

But when she decided on the direction she still hesitated. The recollection of that tall, broad-shouldered young driver, who had been so kind and courteous to her, persisted in obtruding itself on her mind. Perhaps if he was only wounded he might be dying now for want of a little help. He had helped her in her need, he had helped her baby. In common humanity ought she not to go back to his assistance? Was it not cowardly to take the stage and desert him? Longing to go the other way, and weeping hysterically, she finally turned the reluctant horses towards the cañon.

The moon had lit up the vicinity of the scrub oaks by the time the stage moved slowly back on the scene. All was silent and deserted. Suddenly the horses snorted and shied at a mass of blue cloth lying in the road. The woman turned the team to one side and drove it against some trees. Then, taking her baby in her arms, she crept down from her perch and, starting at every sound, stole her way to the prostrate form. It was the driver's face which she uncovered, as ghastly white as her own and smirched with blood and dust. Then she slipped her hand under his coat and laid it over his heart. It was still beating. Hurriedly she searched his pockets for the flask that he had used in her service but a few hours before; it was her turn now. She lifted his head and poured the raw whisky generously down his throat. He responded with a groan and a gasp that frightened her anew, and then struggled to a sitting posture.

"Water!" he cried, "for God's sake, water!" Then, as she hesitated, he continued faintly: "My hat. There's a spring over there," and lay down with another groan.

Her fear was dispelled by the sound of his voice. She found the spring, and, filling his hat, let him drink, and bathed his face and head. He revived at this treatment, and, again sitting up, took out his knife and asked her to cut his sleeve off. "I am losing blood terribly from my arm," he explained. She bravely but tremblingly did as she was told. When she had cut away the soaked cloth, and bared the massive arm, he helped her to improvise a tourniquet with his handkerchief and a piece of stick, and the bleeding was stopped. After a second dose of whisky and water he commenced to improve rapidly. She bound another cloth round his head. "The fellow with the rifle did that," he said. "That is what knocked me off the box. It is only a graze, but it was a mighty close call." Then he struggled to his feet, and, looking round, saw the stage. "They didn't get the box, did they?" he cried eagerly.

"I don't know," she said, taking up her baby. "I don't think so. The horses ran away."

"The horses ran away!" he said, staring wonderingly for the first time at the pretty, white face that was raised to his. "Well, but—why—how did the stage get back here?"

"I brought it back," she replied, lowering her head under his persistent gaze.

"You brought it back!" he exclaimed, "*you!*"

For a few minutes the wounded lieutenant looked down at the slight form of the woman who stood before him in the moonlight, veiled in her own long black hair. Then, as he realised what she had done, he took off his hat and dropped it in the road, having but one available arm, and offered her his hand. She placed hers frankly within it, and he raised the little gauntlet respectfully to his lips. "You are very brave," he said, with considerable feeling; "I am glad to think that perhaps I owe you my life."

The Johnstown stage was later than ever that night when it drew up in front of Abe Goldstein's store, in Pack City. Simultaneously with its arrival the drinking and gambling saloons and other places of public resort suddenly became deserted. It was said that a woman had driven the stage in, and that a man with his head bandaged and his arm in a sling was sitting beside her, holding a baby. While Wells-Fargo's box and the mail-sacks were being taken out (for Goldstein's store was also the express and post-office), the story was briefly given to the crowd. Then a cheering, pistol-firing procession accompanied the stage down the street to the hotel. Here a dozen strong arms fairly lifted the woman from the box, while the baby was only rescued from its mob of volunteer bearded nurses by

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the energetic intervention of the muscular landlady. The lieutenant himself, after being enthusiastically asked to drink in the aggregate liquor enough to have stocked a wholesale whisky store, was put to bed, and a message dispatched for the surgeon at the fort.

Meantime a little party of horsemen swiftly and silently rode out of the town in the direction whence the stage had come. The next day the lieutenant was informed that Whistling Dick had been found dead in the road at the head of Stoney Creek grade. A false grey beard had been picked up near the body, and was thoughtfully offered to the lieutenant as a memento. "We struck the other fellow's trail in that clump of scrub-oak," said his informant. "He was wounded, and there wasn't any trouble in following it. We finally corraled him down in Stoney Creek. But he was game, and played that gun of his for all it was worth before we took him in. You never would have guessed, now, that it was Jim Gatesby himself, the company's new driver. But that's who it was, for a fact. I've heard since that the express folks kind of suspicioned him of standing in on that last robbery."

* * * * *

One year has passed. Again the silent City of Rocks has lost its sharp outlines in the shimmering heat of a July afternoon. On the bench outside of the stage-house door, Nate, the station-keeper, is sitting, reading a month-old newspaper. On the edge of the water-trough opposite him, Frank, the helper, is mending a horse-collar. Presently Nate threw down the paper and said: "Well, I'll be durned!" Frank looked up inquiringly. Nate, rolling a cigarette from a piece of brown wrapping-paper, continued: "Ye rec'lect the old gen'lman from the States wot went up the line about two months after Lieutenant Calverly laid out Whistling Dick and that smarty of a Jim Gatesby?"

Frank nodded his head. He was a man of few words.

"Ye rec'lect how many questions he asked about that little rumpus? Specially 'bout the lady with the kid who showed such a heap of sand? That old gen'lman was her father."

"I knowed that," said Frank, in a tone that resented having his interest excited to no purpose.

"Of course ye knowed it," replied Nate calmly. "Didn't he perk up his head like a grass-fed cayuse and tell ye so when he brought her down the line ag'n about two weeks afterwards? Of course ye knowed it. Didn't he tell every mother's son all along the line that it was his daughter? Why, when he went out to the Sahatlin Agency and got her to give up teachin' the Injuns' kids and go back with him, they tell me that he set up the drinks fer the whole durned town. But ye didn't year how it was that the lady ever come out into this country to teach *siwashes*, did ye? No! Well, then, the way of it was this. She bucked agin the old man in gittin' married. She 'lowed her jedgment laid over his, but it didn't pan out worth a durn. Her husband was no good, and when he found her father wasn't going to chip in to 'em along, he went back on her.

"But she didn't go nosin' round the old man to be tuk back. That warn't her style. She just got an appointment as school-teacher out yere, which was 'bout as fur away as she could git. But she hadn't no more'n gone when her husband passed his checks in a railway smash-up. Well, the old man didn't know where she were, till one day he came across a newspaper telling 'bout the stage bein' jumped out yere. Then he got on to her trail, and followed her up and tuk her home. P'raps ye rec'lect that about two months afterwards the lieutenant went back to the States. Nat'rally. Well, I'm a sluice-robber ef him and she ain't got married! Yes, sir, yere it is in the paper. They say the old man's richer than Blue Gulch, and give 'em a couple of hundred thousand to start on. And wot's more, among the wedding presents they got was a solid silver tea-set with a 'scription on it, as how it was presented to Lieutenant and Mrs. George W. Calverly, by Wells, Fargo, and Company's express, 'in grateful remembrance of their gallant defence of the Johnstown stage.'"

R. Fletcher.

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By Winifred Graham. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

CHAPTER XVII.

Oh, Love! in such a Wilderness as This.

Eleanor grows very fond of Elizabeth Kachin and her dusky son. Since she rescued him that day from the trap Tombo thinks there is no one like the beautiful Mrs. Quinton.

Big Tombo, his father, an educated man who has spent many years of his life in England, also looks upon Eleanor with the same reverence and admiration as little Tombo.

Carol makes fun of the sandy-haired woman wedded to a native, and laughs at Eleanor for being friends with her.

"I have not so many friends that I can afford to pick or choose," she says simply to Quinton, who is smoking in the verandah, his legs crossed, and a graceful air of abandon in his attitude.

She looks lovingly at his long, slim foot, remembering how it attracted her in old days.

"No, darling; I am afraid you must be getting bored to death in this beastly slow place."

A look of alarm steals over Eleanor's features. The distress in her voice is evident as she replies:

"Oh, no, Carol—are you?"

"I have plenty of sport," he says, watching the smoke wreath upwards; "it is different for me."

"And I have you," she answers tenderly. "That is all I want."

"Sweetest Eleanor," he drawls, letting her take his hand. "How easily you are satisfied!"

"I don't quite see that," she answers, puckering her forehead. "I have the only man I love here at my side, glorious scenery all round, I do just as I please, I come and go unquestioned, you have given me a horse to ride, and a house to inhabit, a heart to treasure——"

"Why do you put the heart last?"

She laughs at his question.

"Oh! merely by chance."

"Perhaps it *is* the least valuable," says Quinton, playing with her fingers.

"Don't be silly."

"I wish you were fond of sport, I would teach you to shoot."

"I cannot bear killing things. I really believe I should suffer as much as my victims."

"That would be very weak-minded of you."

"Perhaps, but I *have* a weak mind, you know. I told you that at Copthorne, when you swallowed up my will."

"That sounds as if I were a devouring monster, darling."

She is gazing before her and takes no notice of his remark.

"Copthorne!" she says at last. "*What* a long way off it seems."

"Yes," replies Quinton, "rather fortunate under the circumstances. Your good parents were eminently virtuous; I doubt if they would give me such a friendly welcome now. I say, Eleanor, don't you wish we had Giddy out here. She would wake us up. I should like to see her come in now, with that terrible purple hat, and the white cock's feathers all awry. How full she would be of gossip and how funny!"

He laughs at the recollection of her odd sayings.

"But I don't want waking up," replies Eleanor. "It would be like a douche of cold water thrown rudely over you in a dream to see any face that reminded me of the past. I am sure we don't want Giddy in our paradise. It is far pleasanter without her!"

"You prefer Elizabeth Kachin and her black Tombo!" laughs Carol. "Do you know, Eleanor, you are the only white woman who would speak to her."

"I like them both; they do not bother me with questions."

"By the way, dear, I forgot to tell you Captain Stevenson and Major Short, two old pals of mine, are in these parts. They sent a mounted messenger to ask me to go and see them this afternoon. They don't know what I am doing here. Of course, I shall say 'sport,' that is only another word for 'love.'"

"The two make a bad combination, for some love is only sport to the fickle and untrue."

"How different to yours and mine, Eleanor," he murmurs tenderly. "I wish I could take you with me this afternoon, but it is a long, rough road, and—and——"

"You would rather your friends did not see me, Carol. Don't be afraid to say it. It is very natural. Besides," with a forced smile, "I am so wonderfully pretty, they might become madly enamoured, and kidnap me in these wilds."

There is no conceit in Eleanor's voice or manner as she speaks, but a spirit of cynicism which is new to her.

Quinton kisses her passionately.

"You are beautiful," he whispers.

"Yet you intend leaving me for several long hours! What are these men like?"

"Captain Stevenson is the dearest fellow on earth, and Major Short handsome enough to fascinate any woman. I assure you I am far too jealous to wish to introduce him. His eyes are soft and hazel, the sort that the feminine mind worships—adores! Hair dark and curling, with threads of grey. A smile that has worked destruction in the four quarters of the globe, and a heart so good and tender that he would not intentionally cause a fly a pang."

"I *should* like to meet him," sighs Eleanor.

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"To quote your own sentiments, darling, it is pleasanter alone, we want no one in our paradise, neither Giddy Mounteagle, or the handsome Major Short."

"Now you are vindictive and cross," she declares, as he draws her head down on his shoulder.

"There is my horse. Good-bye, little woman. I shall be back before nightfall."

She watches him ride away, waving from the verandah; he turns several times to kiss his hand.

Then she sinks backs in a low chair, wondering how to kill time until he returns.

The sun sets when he is out of sight, and rises in all its glory at his presence. He is her idol. Her whole happiness and interest lies absorbed in Quinton.

She sends her black servant Quamina to beg Mrs. Kachin to come and sit with her.

It will pass the afternoon to have someone to talk to.

Elizabeth gladly obeys the summons, for she thinks a great deal of her new white friend.

"How is young Tombo?" asks Eleanor, running out to meet Elizabeth, whom she caresses in her affectionately demonstrative manner.

"Oh! so well again, his arm is as good as ever, and he hardly runs stiff at all now."

"My husband has gone to visit two men from Burmah, and I felt terribly deserted and lonely. It is good of you to come Mrs. Kachin."

"I am also glad of a companion," replies Elizabeth. "Big Tombo has gone to superintend the 'Jhooming,' and the boy is with him."

"What is Jhooming?" asks Eleanor.

"Oh! don't you know, they cut down the trees once a year, and burn them when they are quite dry. Then plough the ground, ploughing in all the ash, and sow when the rain comes, scattering the seeds broadcast."

"What busy lives the natives lead! It makes me feel so idle," says Eleanor, stretching her arms. "Yet I love this beautiful country, and enjoy to sit and dream. My days are one long siesta; I am never really awake."

"Ah! you don't work in your home as I do. All this morning I was making clothing for little Tombo on my loom, yet I, too, am happy, Mrs. Quinton. Perhaps you wonder how it is that I married big Tombo. We met in England when I was quite a girl. He was the only honest man it had been my fate to know. I was an unfortunate child, nameless from my birth, yet loved honour and virtue more than anything on earth. My mother was always lenient and kind, but when I grew old enough to realise the wrong she had done me I abhorred her! My marriage released me from a hateful and unwholesome home. I was glad to leave the country in which I first learnt to despise the woman I called by the sacred name of 'mother.'"

Eleanor is pale to the lips; she trembles all over as she listens to Elizabeth.

"I sometimes hear from her now, but she knows my feelings towards her."

"Poor woman!" cries Eleanor, speaking suddenly as if compelled against her will. "You, in your quiet life, with big Tombo, cannot guess the temptations she may have faced. You judge her very harshly. She was kind to you, and it is your duty to love her. You prize virtue and honour, yet do not hesitate to hate and abhor your own flesh and blood."

"It is easy to dictate to others. But if you were to meet that woman, and knew her history, you would pull your skirts aside, for fear they might brush her in passing."

Eleanor shakes her head.

"Oh, no," she says sorrowfully. "I would take her by the hand, and call her 'Sister.'"

"Then you are the right sort of Christian," replies Elizabeth. "I cannot feel that way, because I suffered for her sin—Heaven only knows how bitterly!"

As Eleanor listens to Mrs. Kachin, she feels involuntarily drawn towards her by force of contrast. Their natures are so widely different, for Eleanor was ever lenient, kind-hearted, and forgiving, while Elizabeth is hard, determined, not easily swerved from a purpose.

"Where does your mother live?"

"I hardly know; she is a roving spirit, with no settled home. But her loveless old age is the penalty she must pay for a misused youth. Once she wrote and told me she had enough money laid by to come here if I would receive her."

"And you refused?"

"Most certainly."

"Oh! how *could* you!" cries Eleanor, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"I consider the way I have acted since I came to years of discretion, is simply just retribution. There is a saying that justice begins next door. I have practised it on my nearest of kin."

"You must be very cruel."

Elizabeth smiles vaguely. Her smile is her only beauty. It lights up her stern face, and makes Eleanor forget that she has sandy eyelashes.

They talk together in the low verandah till long after Quinton should have been home.

"He promised not to stay more than an hour with his friends, and it is a two hours' ride," says Eleanor. "He left soon after one o'clock. It is nearly dark."

Elizabeth detects the anxiety in her tone.

"Oh! you know what men are, they are worse than women! The Major has probably a host of good stories, and the Captain is plying him with wine and some extra special cigars. Don't worry, my dear Mrs. Quinton, he is sure to be late."

She presses Eleanor's hand, and wishes her good-bye.

Then Mrs. Katchin hurries up the hill to her hut, where big Tombo is growling at her absence, and little Tombo getting into endless mischief, which only his mother's watchful eye can prevent.

Night has fallen, but still Eleanor waits on the verandah, with widely-opened eyes, staring along the zigzag path by which Carol rode away. She remembers he turned back to look at her three times, kissing his hand twice. What can have detained him? Surely he knows how nervous she is!

Eleanor rises and walks up and down distractedly, her face ashen pale, her figure trembling.

He has had an accident—she is certain of it. The road, he said, was lonely and rough; it winds near a precipice, the loose stones and boulders roll down the slope of the hill and fall into the abyss.

Perhaps his horse has fallen a victim to disease upon the way, or he has been attacked by a savage troop and speared to death.

These thoughts are too horrible to be borne with equanimity; the stillness of night appals her; she can stand it no longer.

Summoning Quamina, she orders her horse to be saddled immediately, with the idea of flying to his aid. She loves him too well to fear the night, the dangers of that lone road, or her indifferent horsemanship! She would die sooner than sit at home when he might need assistance.

Her horse is the handsomest animal that Carol could buy. She has named him "Braye du Valle."

The black men stare wondrously as she mounts and rides out bravely into the night.

"Braye du Valle," she whispers, "we must find him if it costs our lives!"

In the meanwhile Quinton has bidden his friends good-bye, having stayed far later than he intended, talking over old times, and airing his favourite tiger adventures.

It is dark, and he feels a pang of self-reproach at the thought of Eleanor.

Yet his heart is light, and he whistles as he turns his horse's head homewards.

He loses himself in thought, for Carol Quinton is an imaginative man. As far as his fancy is concerned, he is artist, author, poet and actor. He creates pictures in his

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brain, dreams of immortal verse, invents a thousand thrilling anecdotes, and quaint love histories. His train of ideas is more that of a woman than a man.

The moon rises, and he watches it floating above him

> Like one that had been led astray,
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way.

But the soul of the poet, soaring in the high reason of his fancies, is suddenly rudely shaken. His horse starts, throws up its head and snorts, then shies across the road, as a dark shadow blackens the white stretch of moonlit ground.

"Steady," murmurs Quinton, patting the animal's neck, which is damp with sudden terror.

A black figure comes out from the gloom as he speaks—a tall, masked man on horseback—and before Quinton realises his presence he is seized violently by the throat and dragged from his saddle. A hissing sound as of suppressed rage issues from the assassin's lips—he towers above Quinton, and is muscular and active. Carol is taken unawares, and therefore at a disadvantage. He is like a rat in the paws of a tiger; he can neither cry out nor speak, for the cruel fingers press with deadly force upon his windpipe, and he is flung backwards and forwards, shaken till his teeth rattle in his head and his eyes all but drop from their sockets.

The moon swims round in a sea of blood—he gasps, gurgles, struggles.

The savage man in whose clutches he suddenly finds himself seems glorying in his power.

Quinton feels himself face to face with death: he is a child in the hands of this dark highwayman.

The thought rises suddenly to his fading senses:

"By night an Atheist half believes in God."

The terror of judgment is upon him—hell threatens. Through the black slits of the mask he faintly discerns the eyes of his tormentor, whose face is in such close proximity to his own that the hot breath of passion brushes his brow. They are the eyes of a devil, burning as coals of fire—glowing, scintillating. The broad white teeth of the man glisten as they press his lower lip; then he loosens his hold on Quinton's throat, and gropes for his hand.

The two are fighting now like twin devils under the dark trees, through which the moonlight flits. They roll over in the dust, while Quinton breathes out curses, struggling for mastery. More than once he feels one finger of his left hand caught in the stranger's grasp, then, as with a cry of triumph which rends the air with hideous mirth, superhuman strength seems to possess the masked man. He picks up Quinton in his sinewy arms, whirls him once wildly above his head, and drops him over a rock, down a bank—a fall only of a few feet, on to thick undergrowth below. Then leaping back into his saddle, he gallops at full speed towards the jungle, while Quinton lies gasping and shaking, cut and bleeding from the fray.

He rises dizzily—strange!—there are no bones broken, only the uncomfortable feeling of those hot fingers at his throat, and the giddy sensation from the violent shaking. He feels for his watch; it is still there. Some money fallen from his pocket lies loose on the wayside. Nothing apparently is stolen.

Then he looks down suddenly at his finger, the one twice captured in their struggle.

His cat's-eye ring has gone!

CHAPTER XVIII.

> Where there ain't no Ten Commandments.
> *The Road to Mandalay.*—Rudyard Kipling.

As Carol goes on through the night, fear is in his heart.

How easily the dark, vindictive, savage creature could have cast him wantonly into eternity, yet he stayed his hand. Evidently he had not desired Quinton's life, since he took nothing but a little band of gold, with a cat's-eye. Such a worthless prize—a woman's ring.

The scene is a puzzle to Carol Quinton, the mystery of it haunts him. In every shadow he sees a black mask, at the slightest sound his blood runs cold, the creaking of the boughs above are to him the echo of pursuing hoofs, and the cry of the parrot, that sinister yell which accompanied his fall. Even the stars are flashing eyes, the moon an enemy, and the stones devils.

Quinton is not a brave man; truth to tell, he is a coward. His whole system is suffering from the shock, while the long tramp he has taken in search of his horse, which strayed from the road, increased his nervous agitation.

His hands tremble as they hold the reins, his knees knock against his frightened horse, who in sympathy with his master, starts at every step, appearing to find his route peopled with spirits.

"What did it all mean—what could it mean?" he asks himself again and again.

The beating of his heart seems to Quinton as thunder on the air, which is heavy and oppressive, a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours!

Surely this can be no fancy—the slow tread of a sure-footed beast on the path before him. Carol quails and whitens to the lips. The moon passes behind a cloud—a second figure is at his side. He spurs his horse, and the frantic swish of his crop lays a deep weal on the animal's withers. It breaks into a gallop, throwing up the dust around and flying down a steep descent. He hears the hoofs following closely in the rear, some one is nearly upon him, gaining inch by inch. His courage sinks—dies—he is white, perspiring, terrified, limp! His senses reel, he drops the reins, falling forward on his horse's neck. His fingers clutch the mane, while a woman's voice cries behind:

"Carol! Carol!"

The horse recognises Eleanor's soft tones, and halts, just in time for Quinton to fall unharmed, swooning to the earth.

Eleanor springs off "Braye du Valle," sinking on her knees in terror by the helpless form. She sees the bleeding scratches on his face and hands, but feels his heart beat, knowing that he still lives.

"Oh, Carol," she murmurs, pillowing his head on her breast, "what is the matter?"

He stirs faintly, a convulsive shudder runs through his limbs.

"I am here, Carol," she continues tenderly. "I, Eleanor!"

He starts up, staring at her in the moonlight.

"But the man," he gasps, "the masked man who followed me only a moment since. What has happened? What has become of him?"

"*I* followed you down the slope. I came out to find you, fearing you had met with some accident on the road. Just as I was approaching and about to speak, you dashed past me, and then——"

"What then?" interpolates Carol impatiently.

"I suppose you fainted, for I saw you roll from your saddle as the horse drew up at the sound of my voice."

"You ought not to have come," says Carol, somewhat harshly, but Eleanor's blinded senses, dulled under the influence of her love, heed not his ill-temper.

He rises surlily, brushing some blood off his forehead.

He mounts Eleanor upon her horse without a word.

"Why are you so late?" she asks.

"I was attacked on the road by a madman, and half killed," he replies between his teeth.

"Oh, Carol!" she exclaims, her face blanching, "how terrible!"

"Yes, it was rather bad."

Then he describes the scene graphically as they ride on side by side, till Eleanor is shivering with horror.

"Strangely enough," he says, "the only thing I lost in the struggle was that cat's-eye ring you gave me. I think the man imagined it was something of value."

"Is that so?" replies Eleanor slowly, staring before her into the moonlight. "I would rather anything had gone but that."

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"I am sorry, too; I shall miss it."

There is a pause.

"You are ill, exhausted!" murmurs Eleanor sympathetically.

"Oh, no; don't worry. But I wish I knew who the devil that man was."

* * * * *

"Captain Stevenson wants to give me an Irish terrier," says Carol, a few mornings later. "I think it will be well to have a dog about the place, especially after what happened the other night."

"Yes, indeed; I should accept it by all means."

"I will ride over and see him early, and get back by daylight."

Eleanor picks up a book, leaning back wearily. She is growing accustomed to his absences. The Eleanor who was so difficult to please with Philip Roche will stand anything from Carol Quinton.

Her one idea is to yield to his every whim, regard his every wish. To live only to please.

He bends over her. She is reading Shakespeare for the first time.

"What is honour?—a word," she quotes aloud. "What is that word, honour?—air."

He kisses the curling hair on her forehead.

"Good-bye, my love. You shall not be alarmed this time."

"Come back soon, Carol."

She does not rise to kiss her hand or wave as he rides away.

She is beginning to see with a woman's shrewd instinct that he treats her with more deference when she feigns indifference.

She is dreaming over her book, and her idle fingers turn the pages till they come to *Macbeth*. By chance her eyes fall on five familiar words, of whose origin she was ignorant.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!"

A low laugh ripples from her lips, she rises and tosses the volume aside. They have no power to frighten her now, for the to-morrows mean Carol, life, love.

Here in this beautiful country she is passing a charmed existence. Nature in all its majesty around appeals to her senses, ravishes her eye, while she, lovely in her picturesque surroundings, feels like a goddess of the east.

She hears the sounds of hoofs below, and leans over the balustrade, a bright smile parting her lips, the sunlight streaming on her hair, looking quite childlike in her soft white gown, which clings around her girlish figure.

Two men ride up, one tall, fair, and emaciated in appearance, the other dark, and indescribably handsome.

"Does Mr. Quinton live here?" asks the fair man, raising his hat.

"Yes," replies Eleanor, "but he is out now; won't you come in?"

The men hesitate and exchange glances.

"Are you Captain Stevenson and Major Short?" looking at them through her long lashes, with half-veiled curiosity.

They reply in the affirmative, and Eleanor informs them that Carol is already on his way to their encampment at K——

"But I am all alone, and very dull," says Eleanor plaintively. "Do rest and refresh yourselves."

She sends for a man to take their horses, and receives them in the verandah with a gracious air.

"May I ask to whom we have the pleasure of speaking?" murmurs Captain Stevenson.

"Oh! didn't I introduce myself?" says Eleanor with a slight flush. "How stupid of me! I am Mrs. Quinton, you know, or rather you *don't* know," laughing spontaneously. "The fact is Carol and I made a runaway match against the wishes of my relations—very shocking, was it not? But I am not going to appal you with domestic details. A whisky and soda is more to the point. Is not this an ideal spot?"

The visitors hardly notice the surrounding scenery. They are looking at the lovely features of their blushing young hostess.

An Irish terrier has followed them hot and panting into the verandah.

"I have brought the dog I promised your husband," says Captain Stevenson. "He is a fine little fellow, and game for anything."

"It is extremely good of you," cries Eleanor, catching the dog up in her arms, and feeding him with biscuits.

She puts both the strangers at their ease at once. It is long since she has had anyone fresh to talk to, and the time flies, for they all three have much to say. Eleanor will not let them go.

"You must stay and lunch with me," she murmurs persuasively. "Carol will be so angry if I don't keep you, and the days are so long without him."

"I can't think how it was we did not meet if he rode our way," declares Major Short, when lunch is over, and Eleanor has begged them to smoke.

"Nor I; but he must be home early."

"Is that your guitar?" asks Major Short.

"Yes, but unfortunately I cannot play it. Carol has taught me a few chords, but I have no music."

"Short is the man to sing," Captain Stevenson vouchsafes.

Eleanor seizes the instrument, and holds it out to him with a winning smile.

"Do give us one little song!" she pleads.

He takes the guitar with a kind look from his exquisite brown eyes, and strokes the strings, it seems so gently, that they whisper like the wind in the trees.

"What will you have?"

Eleanor leans forward with her chin between her hands, gazing at him intently.

"Anything you like."

"This road," says Captain Stevenson, leaning over the verandah, "is the road to Mandalay. It seems impregnated with the spirit of Rudyard Kipling."

"That shall be the song," says Major Short.

Captain Stevenson half sits on the balustrade, with the terrier beside him gazing up wistfully into his eyes. Eleanor retains her intent attitude, as a voice more beautiful and mellow than any she has ever heard swells out on the hot air.

Eleanor is moved almost to tears by the magnetism of that wonderful sound, thrilling her very being, for she is highly emotional.

The tune is soft, and the well-known words to the familiar melody take pathos from their rough uncultured sentiment.

She remembers once hearing a man recite the words at a musical "At home."

People had cried then; they knew not why, save that his elocution was exquisite, and he breathed it in an undertone:

By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' eastwards to the sea,
There's a Burmah girl a-setting, and I know she thinks o' me,
For the wind is in the palm trees, and the temple bells they say:
"Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay."

Eleanor and Captain Stevenson join in the chorus softly. It is sung slowly, like a low wail, Major Short's clear notes rising above the rest.

Come you back to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay,
Can't you 'ear their paddles chunkin' from Rangoon to Mandalay?
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin' fishes play,
And the dawn comes up like thunder out er China, 'crost the bay.

As they sing, Carol rides up the hill, and the music falls on his astonished ear. Singing in their verandah—how can that be?

Eleanor is the first to catch sight of him, but does not speak or move, though Quinton's presence always quickens her pulses.

The chords of the guitar take up the refrain, and Captain Stevenson, turning, espies Carol.

When the mist was on the rice fields, an' the sun was droppin' low,

continues the rich voice.

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"Why, there's Quinton!" exclaims Captain Stevenson, breaking into the melody. "My dear fellow, how was it we missed on the road?"

"I can't imagine," he replies; "I suppose I took a different path." His eyes shift uneasily, a flush rises to his brow.

"Your wife has been most kind and hospitable," declares Major Short, laying down the guitar.

"I am delighted she kept you."

"We brought the dog. He has already attached himself to Mrs. Quinton. I assure you at lunch his preference for her was most marked; he wouldn't look at us."

"Cupboard love, eh? I suppose she fed him."

"Well, yes, I should rather think so, he will not require anything more for some time."

"I am afraid," says Quinton, "that I interrupted a concert. You all looked most Bohemian and enjoying the *dolce far niente* stage of existence."

"It was too bad to break off in the middle of your song, Major Short," Eleanor murmurs, seating herself beside him and taking up the guitar. "I wish you could teach me the accompaniment, for I do know a few notes vaguely, and though I have never learned to sing I can croon a little."

"It really is not difficult," Major Short assures her. "I will send you the song if you like."

"Thanks, but I cannot read music, only I have rather a good ear."

So he strikes the chords one by one very slowly, while Eleanor repeats them.

"I should never have picked it out by myself. Now I shall be able to sing to Carol in the evenings."

"Are they not delightful?" says Eleanor, as the two men ride away. "I have quite enjoyed to-day, Carol."

"I believe," muttered Major Short as they turned out of sight, "I believe that fellow Quinton lied to his wife. Do you think for a moment he went our way? There is only one road that is fit to ride on, that he could have gone by, besides, it was written on his face when he saw us."

"You are too sharp, Short, my boy," laughed the good-natured Captain Stevenson. "But there is something wrong with Quinton undeniably. I wonder who the little woman is, and where she came from?"

Major Short rides on in silence, he is thinking of the little woman's smile.

That night, as Quinton smokes in his low cane chair, Eleanor brings the guitar, running her lithe fingers over the strings.

"I say, Eleanor," he begins, "you need not have let out you could not read music. It was awfully *gauche* of you. You don't want to advertise your farm origin."

"I am so sorry, darling," she answers penitently.

Again she strikes the chords, this time hesitatingly, for her hand trembles.

The spicy garlic smells are wafted on the night air.

Eleanor breaks suddenly into song, as if inspired by the oriental atmosphere.

When the mist was on the rice fields, an' the sun was droppin' low,
She'd git her little banjo, an' she'd sing "Kullalo-lo!"
With her arm upon my shoulder, an' 'er cheek agin my cheek,
We use ter watch the steamers, and the 'hathis "pilin'" teak.

Her voice travels far in the darkness; she feels as if singing to some unseen audience—perchance spirits peopling that road to Mandalay.

The dog at her feet starts up suddenly, bristling all over, growling, barking!

"Did you hear anything?" asks Carol nervously.

"I fancied a rustle came from the bushes."

"Perhaps danger is stalking abroad to-night," mutters Carol, throwing his cigar aside.

The dog refuses to be silenced, while Eleanor, holding him by the collar, tries to soothe his petulance.

But Carol goes indoors.

(To be continued.)

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Caused by INDIGESTION, etc. All who suffer from this disfiguring complaint should write for DR. HOWELL'S RENOWNED REMEDY, 22, Glasshouse Street, London, W., who guarantees a cure in a few days. 2/6 a box.

AJAX CYCLES FOR LADIES & GENTLEMEN

ARE RICH VALUE. 25 to 30 per cent. saved and carriage paid.
IMMENSE STOCK, NEW AND SECOND HAND.
Easy Terms from 10s. per Month. Lists free.
Now Open.—LARGE CYCLING SCHOOLS, at 42, High Street, Camden Town, LONDON, and at Liverpool.
BRITISH CYCLE MANUFACTURING COMPANY,
42, High Street, Camden Town, London, N.W., and 45, Everton Road, Liverpool.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

GIVEN AWAY £5,000!

GRAHAM & CO.'S

MONSTER GIFTS.

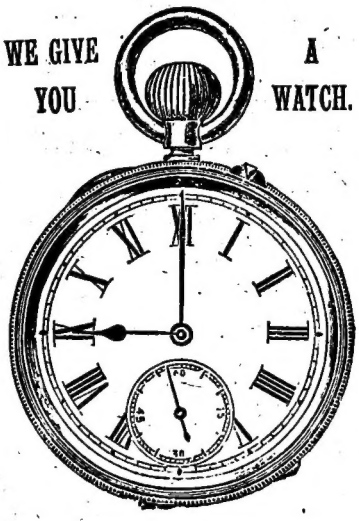
IMPORTANT NOTICE.—Messrs. GRAHAM & CO. intend to present their Customers with a Monster Parcel as a means of advertising their celebrated

EGYPTIAN GOLD JEWELLERY.

For the small sum of **6s. 6d.** we will send as follows:—

NOT A TOY

WE GIVE YOU A WATCH.



	Our Price.	
One Gent's Egyptian Gold Albert, or one Lady's Egyptian Gold Albert	2s. 6d.	FOR
One Seal or Locket for Chain	1s. 6d.	
One Gent's Carbon Diamond Ring, or one Lady's 5-stone Diamond Ring	3s. 6d.	
One Gent's Carbon Diamond Scarfpin, or one Lady's Fashionable Brooch	2s. 6d.	**6s. 6d.**
One Pair of Cuff Links, or one Carbon Diamond Bracelet ...	2s. 6d.	
Total	12s. 6d.	

In addition to the above Every Purchaser will be Presented Free of Charge with one of our handsome

KEYLESS WATCHES.

USUALLY SOLD AT HALF-A-GUINEA.

Read what is said by those who have purchased.

WANTS A SECOND PARCEL.

Lowick-by-Neale, Northumberland, August 17.

Gentlemen,—Received to-day your second parcel of jewellery, with which we are immensely pleased. We really wonder how you can do it. The watch itself is worth more than the money charged for the whole. Many thanks for punctuality.—Very truly yours, WILLIAM McISAAC.

GOES BETTER THAN HIS £15 WATCH.

11, North Street, St. Peters, Tunbridge Wells.

Gentlemen,—Some few weeks ago I sent to your firm for the jewellery and advertised watch, of which I am surprised; the watch is a beautiful timist. I must admit, in fact, it goes better than my £15 gold watch; and for the jewellery it is astonishing value. I think you must lose money over such gifts, as I term it. The watch alone is worth double the 7s. I enclosed. I have shown it to several of my friends, and they were astonished. You can add this to your testimonials if it will be of any service.—I am, Gentlemen, yours faithfully, LEWIS C. RHODES.

GUARANTEED TO KEEP CORRECT TIME.

Any Watch not received in going order will be exchanged.

Every Watch is Carefully Examined, Timed, and Guaranteed a Correct Timekeeper. Call and see them.

We do this to save the enormous cost of advertising, preferring to give our customers the benefit. As we lose money on each parcel we cannot supply more than two parcels to one person. If you cannot call get a P.O. at once, and send for this wonderful parcel. Orders will be executed in Rotation. **MONEY RETURNED IF NOT AS REPRESENTED.**

NOTE.—The entire parcel will be sent for 6s. 6d. (post free, registered, 7s.). Each customer will receive gratis one of our HANDSOMELY ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUES. Be sure and call or send to-day for the

6s. 6d. Monster Presentation Parcel including the Handsome Keyless Watch.

S. S. GRAHAM & CO., 277, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

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